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Happy Valley

Anne Shannon Monroe

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**Gift of The People of the United States
Through the Victory Book Campaign
(A. L. A. — A. R. C. — U. S. O.)
To the Armed Forces and Merchant Marine**

To George -
from Aunt Lill.
Xmas. 1924

HAPPY VALLEY



On the Immigrant Trail

HAPPY VALLEY

A STORY OF OREGON

BY
ANNE SHANNON MONROE

AUTHOR OF
MAKING OF A BUSINESS WOMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY
J. ALLEN ST. JOHN

*The first farmer was the first man
and all historic nobility rests on
possession and use of land—EMERSON*



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To my sister

ELIZABETH MONROE STORY

**Whose rare spirit of happy helpfulness
has made her as my very right hand**

*Get leave to work
In this world—'tis the best you get at all;
For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts
Than men in benediction. God says, "Sweat
For Foreheads;" men say, "Crowns;" and so
We are crowned,
Ay, gashed by some tormenting circle of steel
Which snaps with a secret spring. Get work, get work;
Be sure 'tis better than what you work to get.*

—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

CONTENTS

BOOK I

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	At Two Forks	I
II	Old Man Clark	14
III	Mother Lattig	26
IV	Big John Regan	36
V	Susie of the Star Eyes	51
VI	The Coming of Bullpit	69
VII	Pa's Settlers	81
VIII	Drink Does Its Work	90
IX	The Little Hired Girl	111
X	Good News	116
XI	Bad News	128
XII	Bullpit's Revenge	150
XIII	The Well	156
XIV	The Rescue	179
XV	Blue Ribbons	184

BOOK II

XVI	Leppies, and Other Things	201
XVII	Sorrow in the Valley	211
XVIII	"Worrying Wrong"	232
XIX	What Red Tape Does	242
XX	Lizbeth and Confidences	252
XXI	The Dance at the Schoolhouse	258
XXII	Dark Hours	277
XXIII	Waiting for Spring	283
XXIV	The Old Home Back East	298
XXV	Mother Inn	311
XXVI	Coyote Butte Ranch	315
XXVII	The Railroad at Last	324
XXVIII	Everybody's Back	335

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
On the Immigrant Trail	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Old Man Clark	20
Mother Lattig	44
Bullpit	70
The Book-farmer	84
Van Vader	106
Sol Sneed	123
Lizbeth	189
Old Sody	204
Uncle John Regan	212
Raz Poole	240
Leeda	273
Susie	308

BOOK I

Happy Valley

CHAPTER I

AT TWO FORKS

I AWOKE that morning in the gray, dusty, little cattle town of Two Forks with the terror of life shaking me like a palsy. My lips and tongue were parchment. 'A' scum ridged my teeth. My whole body was loathsome. I tried to sink into unconsciousness, but my senses were maddeningly alert.

I turned over in bed and fixed my gaze on the wallpaper. It was yellowed with age, blistered, and cracked. The design, a sickly, greenish vine which wriggled its way around a brown lattice, seemed a drunken, staggering thing. I traced the design to where it began and ended, began and ended, in dizzying reiteration. A cracked blister moved, a small brown bug crept horribly out from underneath. I shivered back into the sleazy bed-ding, and tried frantically to fix my eyes on something less nauseating.

There was a spidery washstand, and on it a bowl and pitcher of white enamel badly scaled. Beside the stand stood a rusty pail, ready for whatever might be emptied into it. I shrank more deeply under the bedding, and my eyes went on another search of the room for something humanly endurable. The pale-green window-shade was a mass of cracks—the light pitted it like smallpox—and beneath it a coarse lace curtain hung in dejected and slovenly unevenness. I looked to the ceiling. It was stained and streaked from many spillings of water in the room above. 'A big fat blowfly moved heavily across.

A laugh startled me. It came from the lobby outside. I sat up, wide awake, but almost instantly lay down again; my head was too heavy. Anger filled me—it was the Ratter's laugh. I would know that laugh in a thousand—a mean, triumphant, I've-got-you, little sneak of a laugh which was a perfect expression of the hard, cold, tight, little wart of a man from whom it emanated. It was all his doing—the three-days spree. He had insisted on a drink. I hadn't had a drink for over a week. I had known that if I could only get away from the town to the ranch where there was no saloon I could hold out. He had insisted, and I had been a fool — for the thousandth time.

There was a loud banging on the door, then the Ratter's voice: "Starting!"

"Well, start!" I retorted.

The triumphant laugh was repeated, then, "Knocked out?" I didn't answer.

He waited a minute, then jerked open the door. "You've got a half-hour," he said sharply, and went away. I smelled frying ham and boiling coffee. The odor gagged me. I drew the sheet over my face.

There was a second banging on the door. "We're starting at once. Come now—or don't!"

"Go and be damned!" The steps moved away.

I was not again disturbed. Sulky, now, I lay inert under the bedding. I had defied some one—I felt better. I had defied the Ratter. But why couldn't I have defied him three days earlier? The old, weary sickness again filled me. Over and over it had been the same story. Go where I would, it would always be the same. The thing had caught me first at Technical College—I was taking the course in civil engineering—and I was expelled. It had got me again at law school; I was again expelled. I began to study privately in my grandfather's office, and then after six months of going straight there had to be that confounded party celebrating my twenty-first birthday with wine and toasts, winding up with a debauch on my part which

had ended things for me. My grandfather had thrown me bodily out of his life. He had given me a ticket to Two Forks, a scrap of paper calling for a chance at a drawing in a land-selling scheme, and one hundred dollars in cash.

The old Judge's lip had trembled when he hurled these things at me, and his face had purpled. He had been proud of me. I was his only grandson. He didn't think so much of his granddaughters, my sisters. I was named for him, as had been my father. My father had been the first keen disappointment of his life; drink had killed him before he entered his forties. Then the old man had centered his hopes in me—and I was going the same gait, only faster. He was through with me. He as good as said so the night of the party when I made a fool of myself before his guests. He said it again when he handed me my transportation to this out-of-the-way corner of the West.

This was his way of getting rid of me. He had no hope, he had expressed none. But he must get rid of me in a way to save his pride. It was generous enough. My grandfather was not a rich man, for he had had us all to bring up and educate according to his rather expensive standard of education, and many of us to bury. I was sorry for him, for if I truly loved any one on earth it was he. But I was

sorrier for myself, for I didn't want to drink. I wanted to do anything else but drink.

Ennis had come in that morning when I was pushing my clothes into a suitcase—Ennis, blue-white, frail of body, and big-eyed. She took them all out and repacked, smoothly and properly.

"Billy," she said, with a sharpness in her voice which I knew to be a disguise of her real tenderness, "don't you feel too badly about it. You can't help it, really; it's in your blood. It's in all our blood," she went on; and seeing that I was startled, "not the drinking, but the scars of it. We can't help the freaky things we do. It's that that makes me so nervous and see things in the dark, I know it's that. And it's that that makes Claire so queer; makes her talk so often of pleasant little things like suicide and going insane; makes her stay in bed for days at a time with hysteria."

"Ennis, you don't mean—"

"No, Billy, Claire doesn't drink, but it's the drink's scars. It's as if some one had taken a hot poker when we were all little babies and sort of seared our brains over. There's the scar; and some things are not in us that are in balanced folks; they're seared out. We're all queer."

"Not Grandfather," I said. I had worshipped my grandfather since the days when I had ridden

on his foot before the living-room fireplace, and afterward, leaning against his knee, had watched the fire's reflection on the brass andirons while he told me wonderful tales. The old brass andirons and my grandfather's massive white-crowned head were inseparably woven into the happy memories of my childhood. My sisters had always been nervous and finicky. My mother had died early—my mother, always a pale, frightened woman, sitting behind closed blinds and looking down the path that led out of our yard to the street, clutching now and then at her chair arms in an attitude of fearful waiting. My grandfather was the one solid rock of pride in my family.

“No, his father didn't put it on him; but he put it on the rest of us. Billy, I am older than you, and I can remember a lot that has been kept from you. He drank fearfully in his young days, but he was the kind that can drink and continue clear-headed. It never interfered. But Papa was very different. You don't remember him so well, Billy. He was like Grandma's people; like you, slender and delicate, all nerves and temperament. Grandpa himself taught Papa to drink; Mamma said so. Grandpa thought it was the way to do, to get him used to it as he grew up, then he would always drink like a gentleman. But he was of a different temperament

and he couldn't stand it, Billy, so he went down. How he suffered! I can see him now, in delirium tremens, the house all shut up tight and dark to keep people from knowing—Mamma always called it being 'sick'—I can see him now, Billy. I would slip past into his room when no one was watching and watch him as he felt his way round the room, moving his long, thin fingers—fingers just like yours, Billy—over the walls, trying to find a way out. He thought he was bound in by thousands of tiny wires, and if he could only get his finger on the right wire and follow it to the end, he could get out.

"It was tragic—and it was true. He was bound by wires that led back to his father; his own father laid those wires about him. And now they've wound on till they've caught you. There is no way out unless we could follow them clear back to the beginning. There isn't any way, Billy, for he tried so hard, and you are just like him, but not nearly so strong. Billy, I want you to promise me just one thing—don't ever marry. Let's just die off, all that is left of us. Don't fasten the wires about any one else."

All at once I understood my sister Ennis as I never had before—her sharpness, her cynicism, the unexpected leavetaking of John Hale several years

earlier, and her life since then devoted to "nerves" and my grandfather's household. The understanding brought me out of hot anger to hotter tears. I sat limp on the bed while she finished packing.

"I promise," I whispered, "but I'll make good—out West."

I took the suitcase from her. "I'll go on a ranch and make good," I chokingly whispered.

Ennis's face, at last softened by a gentle sadness through which glimmered a faint ray of hope, now came before me. Someway that ray of hope came strongest through the chaos of impressions. To keep it alive, to make it lighten her pinched face and send away all the shadows—that had been the ambition that had held me steadfast on the four days' trip across the continent, had held me on landing at Ossing, on the long stage ride from the railway station to Two Forks, and then—

It had all come from meeting the Ratter, I told myself, but my inner self told me that that was a lie. Always I must meet some one—it came from the devil of thirst within me.

I reached over to the old split-bottom chair for my coat and drew out my wallet. It was empty save for a slip of paper that gave me the title to eighty acres of land, ninety miles south of Two

Forks. I ran my hand into my trousers pocket and brought out some silver and two gold pieces—eighteen dollars and seventy cents.

Again I cursed the Ratter, and again deep inside I knew that I and not the Ratter was to blame. I thought back over the past few days. From the railway station at Ossing we had motored all day and all night, crossing two ranges of mountains. At daylight we had reached Two Forks, the gray, dusty, little cattle town. At breakfast I met the Ratter. It developed that he was the man I had come West to see, a clerk who would conduct the drawing for the Great Western Improvement Company, from whom my grandfather in some idle moment had purchased a ticket.

The company, he was told, had been given a land grant by the government for service in building a wagon road through the inland empire of Oregon. They had subdivided this land into tracts ranging from twenty to two hundred acres, and the only uncertainty with a ticket holder was which parcel he would draw. The drawing had taken place and I had been lucky, winning eighty acres. It had seemed a good omen, and I was in high spirits, until I noticed the queer, silent smiles of men who stood in little knots about the street corners. I made inquiries. Oh, yes, the land was there all

right. Yes, the title was sound, a straight patent from the government to the company. I asked no further questions. I meant to take a chance and find out what the smiles meant later. Perhaps they were smiling at my clothes. Well, I smiled at theirs. If cowboy-land was lazily quiet and dustily uneventful, it was at least true to fiction in dress. And then I had met the Ratter again, and being blue, became an easy victim.

Again I counted my money. I wondered why they had left me that much. Of what use was eighteen dollars and seventy cents to a man stranded in a dead little cattle town two hundred miles from a railroad? It probably would not more than pay my hotel bill, if the rumors of prices out West were true. Unable to stand my own thoughts any longer, I got up and washed and dressed and went out into the lobby.

The hotel keeper, old Van Vader, sat in a dilapidated armchair before a rusty heating stove, his head hunched down between his shoulders, his long chin sunk between the sharp knuckles of his two hands, his long, bleached-out, sandy mustache curled around his fists like some giant beetle's pincers. I took a vacant chair opposite him. At the same moment the outside door was pushed open and a big, blustering man burst in. A seven-passenger

touring car had stopped before the door, and other men were getting out.

"We want an extra early dinner and we want it damn quick, see?" said the stranger, charging up to Van Vader, who had not changed his position.

"Hustle, man! We've got the price!" He jangled coin alluringly in his pocket.

Van Vader lifted his chin just sufficiently to work his jaw. "I guess you've tied up at the wrong stall." His chin went back to his knuckles.

The stranger opened his eyes wide, came close, frowned, then whirled and strode out, damning the country. The big car buzzed on down the dusty street.

Van Vader again lifted his long chin from his knuckles. "Guess you'll be wantin' somethin' to eat, boy. How'd an egg, poached tender, set on your stummick?" He got up and ambled toward the dining-room. Surprised, I followed him. He tied on his apron and pushing open a swinging door, went into the kitchen and poached an egg. He also brought me a cup of thick black coffee. I drank it all, though it was as bitter as only long-standing, much-boiled coffee can be. Also I ate the egg. And then some way I felt better about the dusty little town and the Ratter and myself and the whole

world. I wanted to see my ranch. I'd make good yet.

"I wonder," I ventured to old Van, back in his armchair and his knuckles, "if I could get a horse and overtake the Rat—Bullpit?"

"You wantin' to overtake Bullpit?" He lifted his chin and spoke lazily in an altogether casual tone.

"Yes, if you think I could manage to keep the right road."

"There's just one main-traveled road south."

I pulled out my watch, a handsome one, my twenty-first birthday gift from my grandfather. I knew with what precise care his exquisite taste had selected it. But there was no other way.

"I'm short of cash, but if I could leave this watch with you and get a horse—"

He again lifted his chin from his knuckles, this time twisting his head on his neck with a gesture of pointing. "Sol's eatin' hay in the corral out back; you'll find a saddle on the fence."

I thanked him, but his chin had again sunk between his knuckles, and already into his eyes had come a far-away look such as I have seen in the eyes of a puma, blinking in the sun in a park cage as he dreamed of his wilderness home. My words were wasted.

When I came around to the door with the horse,

a long-legged, lanky buckskin that had never seen currycomb or brush but had spirit, Van Vader met me with a parcel. "You'll need grub. Follow the main road south. About twenty miles out you'll come to a well-traveled road leadin' off to the left; it goes to the Q ranch. Bullpit might stay there tonight; otherwise you'll find him on the main road that leads on over Wind Mountain into Happy Valley."

"If I don't see him I'll inquire," I answered glibly, from my mount.

He smiled a queer, slow smile and turned back into the hotel.

CHAPTER II

OLD MAN CLARK

FOR a long time I rode moodily, seeing nothing. At last the country began to edge in. Ahead was a yellow, dusty road that wound endlessly and monotonously through a vast plain of yellowish-gray sagebrush. I looked back; already Two Forks was out of sight. There was nothing on the landscape except an undulating grayness that billowed interminably to far-away, purple mountain ranges which were pierced here and there by snowy peaks. For hours there came no change, nothing to show that I approached the place for which I had started. The hills before me seemed no nearer, those back of me did not recede. I might have been on a treadmill. At long intervals I passed deserted cabins built of upright boards, surrounded by a small clearing. A dead jack rabbit lay here and there, and occasionally a live one scampered through the brush. Every few paces meadow larks would fly up from the brush, spilling liquid notes on the still air in a perfect abandon to joy. "It is spring; it is spring," they seemed caroling.

My brain began to lose its mugginess. I liked the air — there was a tang in it. The sky was clear of clouds, blue, and very high. 'A' golden light lay shimmering like a live thing over the desert. I got into a swaying, rhythmic, sing-song motion with the country. The shimmer of the air, the forever undulating plains, the mystic, retreating hills, my horse loping steadily with long, easy gait—everything seemed moving in perfect rhythm. The earth was loping along too, and the sky and all of us, loping along through space together. Once I reined in my horse to listen. There was not a sound in the whole universe, not another human being.

It was well after sunset before I thought of eating and then I found that I was hungry. I saw a cabin and decided to stop for the night. There was no sign of life. I got down and knocked loudly. There was no answer. I opened the door and stepped in — the cabin was empty. There was a bunk against the wall in which was some very old hay. On a small, rudely constructed table was a candle, and on a shelf were some empty cans and dust. Dust everywhere. 'A' yellowed scrap of paper tacked to the wall above a small mirror performed hospitality's rites:

“Welcum stranger drink lite ete harty sleep sound.”

I whistled as I accepted my host's invitation, and went out to unsaddle and hobble Sol. At the rear of the house the ground was marshy, and over the moist earth was a white crust. I went on and discovered a spring. Water poured ceaselessly from many tiny fountains. It had a slick, sweetish taste, suggesting soda and borax. I led Sol over for a drink. He put down his head thirstily, blew in the water, took a few tasting sips, and then tossed his head defiantly. He elected to thirst. I staked him near that he might change his mind if so inclined, then returned to the cabin and started a fire. I opened my lunch. There was bread and butter, bacon, and coffee. Soon the bacon was sizzling, and the coffee boiling in one of the tomato cans. I ate ravenously.

The next morning I got an early start. Though stiff and sore I was in good spirits. I would find my man, I would locate my ranch, I would build a cabin and make good. Somehow, I would make good.

In a couple of hours I reached Wind Mountain. I decided to climb to the top and if I did not see my party, go back to the Q Ranch. I rode on. From the top of the mountain I looked on to another vast valley that swept off to far low-lying hills. This valley was walled to the right with rocky ridges

from which extended long, low, finger-like buttes. It had more individuality than the other valley. A few miles off I made out a rig of some kind in a cloud of dust, very likely Bullpit. I rode on down the mountain, urging my horse to make the best speed possible down the steep, rutty incline. Now that I was actually nearing my ranch I was possessed by an impatient eagerness to see it. In an hour I came up with the party.

The Ratter sat crouched down on the front seat of the hack, his hands lazily holding the lines. The four men with him had each settled back within himself in an angry sort of silence, a very different sort from the singing silence which filled the desert.

As I rode alongside, Bullpit drew up. An amused smile twisted his lips. "So," he greeted me. The others stared moodily and made no sign. They did not look happy. I laid it to the dust which filled the hack, the wind blowing it in their faces.

"Can you locate me?" I asked, determined to keep my temper with the Ratter.

He looked around at his men. "Can I locate him?" He seemed to think it a great joke.

"Locate hell!" The voice exploded from a linen ulster.

The Ratter laughed. Oh, he had had an amusing trip, the Ratter! He asked for the slip I had got

in the drawing, and consulted a blue print. "In luck," he announced to the others, who remained wrapped in dust and anger. "Not more'n two miles from here. It won't put us back much. We can't more than make the Q Ranch tonight, anyway." Presently he turned the horses out of the road into the sagebrush, through which they crushed their way as easily as through a way of straws. He drove on until he came up against the rim rock that walled that side of the valley, then got out and began looking for a corner. I got down and helped.

"Here it is," he announced. "You sure picked a winner—begins here and covers eighty acres of as good rim rock as there is in the country." He went off into a spasm of laughter.

I stood looking at him, every fibre of my being tingling with rage, I wanted to spring on him, seize his thin, working little throat and choke him to death. A querulous voice called, "Come on, come on, we've wasted time enough on this damn country."

The Ratter shrugged. "I didn't make the country." He seemed washing his hands of the whole matter. "I didn't sell you your tickets." He returned to his rig. I heard him chuckle as he guided the horses back through the crunching sage to the main road.

I sat down on a boulder and watched the dust roll up the mountain side. Had it been anyone but the Ratter! There was nothing for which to return to Two Forks—but I had old Van Vader's horse—I had left my watch on his register—it was his horse. No, I could not go back to Two Forks—not yet. Maybe there was another way out of the country. Maybe if I should ride on south through the valley I would come to another town; somewhere there must be another town—and Vader had my watch. It was a valuable watch, heavily jeweled. It was worth many times the old buckskin horse. Nevertheless, it was his horse and saddle—I decided at last to ride on through the valley. I still had some lunch. I could not go back to Two Forks, not at once; I could not face the Ratter with his mean, triumphant laugh, and the half-veiled smiles of the townspeople who had known all along.

It helped, just mounting again and feeling the long, easy lope of old Sol. I must have ridden fully ten miles down into the heart of the valley when I saw a smoke rising ahead of me, and soon I made out a team, a wagon, and men. The team was feeding. Three men were moving about the fire. A cattle outfit, I decided, and rode on.

“Hello, stranger! Won't you light?” An old man greeted me, a bronzed, rough, red-necked, squat



Old Man Clark

old man with a heavy, square jaw and deepset eyes that twinkled good-humoredly. I sprang to the ground. They were cooking dinner. The other two looked silently at me, after a brief nod. Both were young, slender, and heavily tanned.

"May I share your fire?" I untied my lunch.

"Better share our dinner; cooked enough for a dozen, Ed has; family man; used to cookin' for a full house." The old man laughed enormously at his joke. Ed stirred potatoes solemnly; the other grinned. I ran my hand into my pocket for money, then remembering the cross-fire of the morning before between Van Vader and the man with "the price," withdrew it. This was not a country where money could buy all things on all occasions.

"I shall be glad to do so," I said. "I'm not much of a cook."

"New to these parts?" the old man asked, then quickly added, as though his question had been an indiscretion, "Some takes to cookin' natural and some don't, and that's all there is to it. My second girl, Ed here's wife—she never took to it. Her mother blames me; says I made a boy of her; she can ride with any buckaroo from here to Texas, barrin' none. She's right there with the ridin' and ropin' and brandin' and wranglin', but when it comes to makin' biscuit, oh my!" He doubled up in a con-

vulsion of laughter while the tears rolled down his cheeks. "But Ed now," he twisted his head toward Ed, "her man, he can make biscuit. She drewed right when she drewed Ed." There was distinct pride in his voice. "Ed" colored, and became very busy with the eats. He opened a Dutch oven, set out a pan of flaky biscuit, and told us to help ourselves. There were fried bacon and potatoes. It seemed to me the best food I ever tasted.

When we finished eating we continued to sit around the dying fire in that comfortably lazy state of mind induced by a hearty meal for which you are a little bit more than ready.

I had noticed the old man's check on himself after starting to question me, so I took the cue and asked no questions; but I wondered about them. My curiosity was to be satisfied. With a final drawing of his blue flannel sleeve across his mouth, and a thoroughly satisfied expression, he gazed about him.

"Boys," he said, "you can go on if you like. The old man stops right here."

The young men looked at each other, then off at the expanse of country in which they were as a pin prick. The other one, whom they called Jim, spoke. "What's good enough for Dad's good enough for me."

Then Ed: "Drive in your stake, Dad."

"They ain't no choice, boys," the old man went on. He dug his stubby fingers into the soil. "It's good dark loam, and moist underneath all through this valley, I imagine. It'll dry farm somethin' great. We're at about the center, where a town'd naturally come. When a railroad pulls in, it'll hit along the center. I ain't particular, boys, you choose first."

"You're the oldest, Dad, you first."

The old man drew out a blue-print map and spread it on the ground, weighting it down at the corners with stones. The two young men seriously studied it and then gazed about them. I was mystified. How could one select one particular little spot in that waste of land? It looked hopelessly vast and vague to me. Ed pulled a dime from his pocket and giving it a whirl, it landed on the blue print, where it spun around and came to rest. All three heads bent. He lifted the coin and proclaimed the section number. It had fallen, strangely, on the section where we sat. That decided the matter. The old man went to the wagon, took out a stake, and drove it down. "This one's mine," he said. The boys then tossed up for the next choice. It fell to Jim. He took the three hundred and twenty acres adjoining the old man on the right. Ed, with the caution of a true Scot—which I later found that

he was—walked about and studied the distant landscape.

“Seems to me there’s a bunch of different green off toward that butte,” he said, nodding to the west. “Must be water there. I’d somehow feel more sure with water.”

“That’s close enough neighbors for real pioneer-in’,” said the old man, “and plenty close to the railroad—when it gets in. Can’t be more’n four or five miles at the most, and might be less. Better ride off and take a look at it. If a man wants water, water he’d orter have. I always like the center of the valley, myself; someway got a hankerin’ after the center; every man to his hankerin’.”

“If a fellow should want to irrigate—” began Ed.

“But we was all going in for dry farming,” interrupted Jim.

“A fellow might want to irrigate,” persisted Ed.

“Now, Ed, you just take Baldy and go along and look at that land. Jim and me’ll smoke and rest and read the evenin’ paper when the boy brings it ’round.” He chuckled over his joke. “Tomorrow’s time enough to start back; never was a better day than the one comin’.”

Ed started for his horse, then turned back to me. “Won’t you come along?”

“Yes, go along,” urged the old man. “And what might be your name, son?”

“Brent; Billy Brent.” A foolish whim struck me. I wanted the old man to call me Billy.

“Take along the ax and the blue print,” he called to Ed. “And Billy, you get a couple of stakes from the wagon.”

CHAPTER III

MOTHER LATTIG

ED fell slowly into talk, but by the time we reached the watered land, he had told me all about themselves. He and Jim were the old man's sons-in-law. The three had been working in lumber mills in California, but the mills had closed down. The old man had spent most of his life pioneering. He had fought potato bugs in Texas, prairie dogs in Kansas, and chinch bugs in Oklahoma.

He had lived in San Francisco the past five years, where his two older daughters had married and where his youngest, Susie, had been going to school. No, he hadn't any sons, but Susie was as good as a boy any day. She was only sixteen, but she was a great girl. Well, when work had closed down, the old man, who had been restive right along living in town, got the pioneering fever bad, with the result that all three finally got it, pooled their possessions, realized as much cash as possible, and started out to find a place in which to pioneer. He and Jim were willing enough, for work was uncertain in the

mills, and it took all a man earned to live, especially with a growing family.

Neither of the younger men had had much experience except in heavy timber — they were engineers by trade. They had, altogether, about two thousand dollars in cash. They had been traveling for over a month through Northern California and Eastern Oregon and they had inspected about all the government land there was. Neither he nor Jim knew much about soils, but Dad did, and they were staking his judgment on the throw. Dad said this soil was a top-notch for dry farming.

He also said that a railroad would tap this great inland empire soon. There had been pieces in the papers about it recently; in fact, that was what had finally got them all started — the talk of a railroad. The Merriman people had kept Eastern Oregon bottled up for over a quarter of a century, but their own interests would be better advanced now by development. It was the last West, and it contained fifty-six million acres, a few million of which was the finest wheat land in the whole world, not barring Canada; to say nothing of billions of feet of white pine on the inland mountain slopes, unknown wealth in coal, oil, soda, borax, and God knows what else.

Nothing had been developed because it was shut off from markets. Mountains closed it in — a per-

fect barricade — on the west, north, and east. There was said to be but one possible pass on each of these sides, and these were controlled by the Merriman people. The Northern Pass, Roaring Canyon, was a terrific gorge one hundred miles long and narrow, with perpendicular walls of stone, in many places two thousand feet high. It would be expensive rail-roading, but they would go to it all right — trust the Merrimans. Why, hadn't they passed surveying crews and seen them running lines with their very own eyes? A surveyor was like the first swallow — it meant the rest was coming.

Besides — according to Dad — they could make it without a railroad — for a while, anyway. It was a stock country and they could make it on stock. They meant to raise grain and start with a few pigs and some cattle. Other settlers would come in. All you had to do, Dad said, was to start a settler movement and others would follow. The whole country would be settled up in no time. They had found it in the raw but for the big cattle ranches which averaged one hundred miles apart, and they would have their pick.

"We'll use tents on the start-off," he explained; and finally, "Married?" It was his first question. I remembered Ennis's last request and my readily given promise.

"No," I answered, "and not going to be." For the first time, somehow, I cared.

He drew his mouth into a one-sided smile as much as to say he understood—they all talked that way—but he only said, "Homesteadin' would be right down lonesome for a bachelor. Most of the deserted homesteads were deserted by bachelors, Dad says."

We found an immense spring gushing from the side of the butte and forming a considerable pool, on top of which floated water cress, green and fresh and peppery. The water was crystal clear and as cold as ice. Also it was good sweet water. Our horses filled up like camels. So did we, lying flat on our stomachs. The land lay high and level as a table, overlooking the whole vast valley. I wanted to climb the butte, which wasn't over two hundred feet high, and see what lay on the other side.

"This being watered," Ed said, "cuts me out of getting three hundred and twenty. I can take only one hundred and sixty, watered. Wish I could have the whole table."

"Isn't there another government act?"

"Desert; but you can't take land that's watered under the desert act; that's what it means—you've got to get water on it."

"Perhaps it is not all watered," I suggested. We

rode around the butte and Ed suddenly reined in his horse. From the chimney of a cabin not a mile away smoke issued. "So—I've a neighbor," he exclaimed. "Suppose we call and pass the time o' day." It matters who your neighbor is when you have just one.

We halted before a small weather-grayed cabin of upright boards and Ed slid to the ground and rapped on the door. Heavy footsteps crossed a board floor, the door was pulled open, and a large, swarthy-skinned woman completely filled the space. Coarse, unbrushed black hair framed her big face, while her coal-black eyes were set in rims fiery red from crying—or dust. She wore a green-checked gingham apron which hung full from a belt and above it was a man's jumper of blue denim. She kept one hand under her apron.

"Me got no money, me got no money," she cried out in broken guttural tones. She seemed to be Hungarian.

"Neither have we," Ed answered, seeing she was frightened. "We're your new neighbors; three families of us are settling in your valley; we've come to make a friendly call."

"Neighbors?" She bent closer and peered into Ed's face. "You my neighbors? You come live by me? Oh! mine gootness—neighbors!" She

spoke rapidly, and in her excitement she drew her hand from under her apron. She had a gun.

"We sure are," Ed answered. "I'm locating over there on the plateau." He pointed proudly to his piece of land. "I'm your neighbor all right, and there's others."

"Neighbors! Oh! mine gootness—neighbors!" She dropped the gun and seizing her apron in both hands threw it to her face and began to sway and sob. The gesture displayed two stocky overall-encased legs. "Ah, God, neighbors!" came in thick gutturals. Then as abruptly she threw down the apron and made a rush at Ed and clung to him, sobbing and swaying and hugging him.

I got down from my horse. Ed didn't smile. I hadn't felt like smiling, even at the two stout legs beneath the huge apron.

"And what is your name? Ed McKenzie? Dat fine; and yours—Billy Brent? Come in, Ed McKenzie; come in, Billy Brent. Neighbors, ah, God!" She backed into the room and shooed out the cat; she pushed the dog, a lazy, white hound, out of the way. We followed her in.

"Better pick up your gun," Ed said. The suggestion served to take her mind off the appearance of neighbors. With tears streaming down her big, good-natured face, she picked up the gun, all the

time backing about, mindful now of her overall exposure to the rear.

"I hear you come," she explained, now laughing and crying together, while she pushed forward chairs for us, "and I say, 'Some one come kill me.' I see gun. I take heem down. I don't cannot shoot. I turn heem dis way and I turn heem dat"—she illustrated, bending her huge body over the small pistol. "I pull on dis and I pull on dat. I press heem screw. I jam heem here and I jam heem dere. But he don't cannot go. Once I scared at sheep man. I take heem down. I pull on some-dings. He go off—queek—like dat! I put heem away and I say—I never touch heem again! And here today once more—no, never again!" She pushed the gun viciously back onto a shelf. A rifle stood in the corner.

"Do you live here all alone?" I asked. It didn't seem possible.

"My boy Tom he go to mills for lumber; leave me all alone. He leave plenty grub. He say, 'Mudder, I be back soon, but if I don't come, I be back pretty soon.' De days and de nights come—and he don't cannot come. One day de wind he blow. Ah, God, he never blow before, he never blow after. I open door queek, and I shut heem queek! I cannot got no place to go. I stay in de house, and he

rock, and I cry. Ah, God, how much water I drop down onto de ranch! I go to bed. I get up. I tink mebbby my boy come. Mebbby not. I don't cannot know. I tink I die and when he come I be all gone. De sheep man come. He say my boy hurt at mill. He not bad hurt. He come pretty queek now. He send grub. Dat been—" She got up and, forgetting her overalls, lumbered over to the wall where she had cut notches in the stripping, and slowly counted. "Dat been forty days now and he don't cannot come." The tears gushed from her eyes and she began again to sway and sob, again having recourse to her apron; almost at once she sprang up and lumbered over to the door. She seemed under the necessity of acting everything out.

"I get up in de morning, and I go to de door, and I bow deep, and I say, 'Good morning, Mr. Mountaing,' and I wait—but he don't cannot answer." She shook her head sadly. "And I turn to de east, and I say, 'Good morning, Mr. Mountaing,' and he don't cannot answer; and I turn to de west and I say, 'Good morning, Mr. Mountaing,' and he don't cannot answer. Ah, God, I all alone!" The tears poured down her swarthy cheeks, but before either of us could speak, she remembered her hospitality, and drawing one hand after another over

her eyes, she turned a bright look on us. "What I tink? I get supper for my neighbors. Where have gone it my manners, I hope!"

We insisted that we had been fed, and then explained that we must get back to camp. Ed told her about his father-in-law.

"And a woom?" she asked, "old—like me?" Her face twitched with eagerness.

"Yes, the best woman on earth, my wife's mother. And there's my wife and Jim's wife and Susie. We will all be living here soon."

"You come pretty queek?" She all but clung to us.

"As quick as possible."

"You go Two Forks way?"

"Yes."

"Then mebbly you see my boy, yes? You tell heem hees mudder most dead, yes? You got garden seed, yes? I lika get some." She hurried down the steps, and swept her arm about a cleared patch. "I clear all heem wid my two hands, yes. I lika garden seed. You see my boy, yes?"

We agreed to find her boy and then remembered that we didn't know her name.

"Lattig. Nish Lattig. You come back queek!"

She stood mopping her eyes with her apron as we rode off, and neither of us smiled at the two stout

kegs of legs encased in their overalls. Ed was silent. As we neared camp and the cheerful greeting of the old man came to us, he sighed deeply. "I can't do it," he said. "I can't take Lil off to a place all alone like that. I'll just file alongside the old man where she'll be close to her mother."

"Then," I said, "do you mind my filing on your plateau?"

"Take it, and luck." He held out his hand. Some way I felt awfully close to Ed.

CHAPTER IV

BIG JOHN REGAN

I UNSADDLED Sol and turned him into the corral, then went at once into the hotel. Van Vader sat as I had left him four days earlier, his long chin sunk between his knuckles, his straw-colored, beetle-pincer mustache hooping the whole.

"Mr. Vader," I said, "I've returned your horse, and I am going to ask another favor. I want to file on a homestead and I've got just about the filing fee. Will you continue to hold my watch for my board bill and horse hire so I can file?"

He dislodged one fist, ran it into his pocket, pulled out my watch and held it out to me. My heart went down—I wanted that land with the spring on it. I particularly wanted that spring. "Awful careless about leavin' your things 'round," he drawled. "Make yourself at home, boy, and pay when you can."

"But—Mr. Vader—"

He continued to hold out the watch. "Better be gettin' over't the land office. There's others has

went down that way lately that may have filin' intentions."

"If I could get a job at something; you haven't a clerk—" I stopped. The office register lay open on a kitchen table for anyone to use who had the habit. Van's wife was chambermaid and waitress and he was cook.

"What can you do? Ever shofe?"

A chauffeur—and my grandfather, old Judge Brent, one of the most brilliant lawyers in his state!

"Regan was in here from the Q Ranch a few minutes ago wantin' a shofe. He'd like's not give you a chance if you are a good one. If you can't shofe he might send you to a shoffin' school. He has others."

"Thank you. I've driven my own car since I was sixteen." He eyed me queerly, then resumed his chin-knuckle position and his puma gaze into space. I instantly regretted my speech. "I will do anything I can get to do," I added quickly.

"Then put your watch in your pocket and go file," he said, sharply.

When I returned a half-hour later with a document from Uncle Sam, which made me tentative owner of one hundred and sixty acres of sagebrush land, a group of stockmen had formed in the lobby. In the center was a large, heavy man with a massive

head showing shaggy, dark hair beneath a wide, black hat which was pushed back from his forehead, and a broad, beaming face, every line of which proclaimed the utmost good humor. He was recounting an experience he had just had with a cattle trader whom they all seemed to know, and who had sworn off drinking.

"By the gushins, John, them's good cattle," he says to me. "Not very good, Jim," I says, "you've been stringing out the hay on 'em. "By the gushins, John," he says, "I didn't think you'd notice that." With that he stamped into the house, and demanded of his wife the little brown bottle; but he couldn't wait for her to get it; he goes and gets it himself, and he pours out a drink and drinks it down, and he says, "By the gushins, if I'd a had a drink I'd a asked John fifty cents apiece a hundred more on them cattle; and by the gushins, he'd a paid it too."

A roar of laughter greeted the last words. Van Vader, grinning gleefully, at length remembered me and performed the rites: "Brent, shake hands with John Regan. Brent's the homesteader I was tellin' you about."

The man's grip was firm and his deep-set, blue-gray eyes looked penetratingly into mine. Then he laughed a funny little chuckle, and I thought to

myself he was certainly the most good-natured man on earth. All at once, as he again looked steadily into my eyes, I felt that I wouldn't want to fail him and be anywhere around when he found it out. The others filed into the dining-room.

"Got you run into the bunch already, have they?" he said in a low, kindly voice. "Well, there's nothing like a piece of land."

"That job at shoffin'," Van Vader drawled out, just barely lifting his chin, "is took." I was disappointed, for all at once I wanted to "shofe" for this man.

"Where's your land?" asked Regan.

I handed him my document.

"You must be pretty close to old lady Lattig."

"There is one section between us, sir."

"You'd like to go on your ranch now; you'd like to go on your ranch right now," and he repeated, eying me steadily. "Yes, you'd like to go on your ranch right now."

"I would, Mr. Regan."

"I thought so. Now, why can't we fix it up first-rate? Tom Lattig is just getting around from a bad fall at the lumber mill up in the mountains. He won't walk much for a spell. The thing is for you to take his team and lumber and supplies and go down and stay with his mother till he is fit for ranch

work again. He can't pay you anything, but you'll have your board and your time for grubbing sage-brush; and he'd feel safe about his mother. Yes," he eyed me with an intent steadiness that some way fixed responsibility on me, "he'd feel safe about his mother."

"That would suit me," I said, "except that I owe Mr. Vader a little bill. If he will keep my watch—" I pulled it out again. Van Vader removed the prop from his chin to wave the watch away.

Regan chuckled. "Van hasn't got much use for time," he said mildly. "No, Van hasn't got much use for time."

I was still troubled about it and I suppose my face said as much. Regan held out his hand. "You're an asset, Mr. Brent. We need young men to settle up the country. And when you're in debt you've got a responsibility most as good as a wife. Just leave it on the books. We'll see Tom Lattig and get the thing fixed up."

He started with quick decisiveness toward the door.

"I am sorry to trouble you," I said. "Perhaps I can find him."

"No trouble at all. Tom's right out here in my car." Tom Lattig was the stockman's new chauffeur.

I had never handled four horses before and the job took my closest attention. The leaders were steady pullers, but the other team had been driven only once in harness, and but for the heavy load of lumber they would have played smash with the outfit. As it was I had to keep my eyes constantly on them. My wrists ached, and all my back muscles were sore. At the end of three days I came in sight of the cabin. I had made just two purchases, a choice variety of garden seed for the old lady Lattig and a pair of overalls.

She came plumping heavily through the sagebrush to meet me. I knew that she had recognized the horses, and had mistaken me for her son. I dreaded the moment she should discover her mistake. I couldn't hurry the fagged horses, but she could hurry. Her great weight charged along, carried by mother-wings. When quite close, she stopped in the road, her hands on her hips—she now wore a regulation woman's dress with its proper skirt—and waited. When she recognized me she threw her apron to her face in a gesture of terrible anguish.

"Tom's all right; he's got a job," I called to her. "He's sent me down with his load."

"He not all dead?" The apron was thrust away

from her face, as the deep guttural voice made the demand.

"He's very much alive, with a fine, spanking new job of driving Mr. Regan's big seven-passenger touring car," I explained. And as she came closer, "His leg isn't quite sound yet for ranch work, so I'm to be your boy for a while. Yes, he is all right — on my honor. He sent you this." I reached down and handed her Tom's note. She climbed up and, settling comfortably on the fresh-smelling pine boards, tore open the envelope. The tears began to pour down her cheeks as she recognized the writing; she swayed back and forth in an agony of delay as she laboriously spelled out each word. All through the reading she continued to ejaculate: "Ah, God!" "Ah, my boy!" He had evidently kept from his mother till now the seriousness of his injury. I drove on steadily and a silly lump rose in my throat. To have some one love a fellow and cry about him like that!

By the time we reached the cabin the old lady was laughing as heartily as she had cried, and telling me of her experience with a badger which she had beaten to death with a piece of sagebrush. She hurried into the cabin to prepare supper, very much excited over having some one to cook for. I unhitched the horses, then threw the lumber off the

wagon. I don't think I was ever so utterly exhausted in my life as I was that night. The cabin had a lean-to, and here the old lady stowed me away, in Tom's bed. It was merely a set of springs, padded with quilts, that rested on four spaghetti boxes, but a more welcome bed I never had.

The next morning I was awakened by my hostess appearing in the doorway with a gun over her shoulder. Had she suddenly gone mad? Stiff and sore as I was, I sat up instantly.

"You show me how to shoot heem," she said. "I ask my boy, he laugh, but bimeby when he come home, I shoot, so, and he don't cannot laugh no more."

I took the rifle and initiated her into the intricacies of loading, putting it on safety, taking it off, promising that after breakfast we would have a shooting match. She was intensely excited over the prospect and hurried away to the frying of ham and the making of coffee.

Later I visited my ranch. It looked mighty good to me. The elevation gave it a beautiful outlook over the great wide valley and the spring water was the finest I ever drank. From the top of the butte, a gradual climb of about two hundred feet, the view of the whole country was superb. And best of all, it was mine, my own soil, the first thing I had ever

owned that hadn't been handed me outright by my grandfather. I felt as proud, pacing my lonely butte, as any captain ever felt on the deck of his ship. I went down at last and walked over my plateau, selecting a site for the cabin. Naturally, it must be near the spring. The rim rock should furnish building stone. I wanted to build solidly. The homestead cabins of upright boards looked poverty-stricken and perishable. I meant to stay, to stay forever in this land where the air had a tang in it and everything was at its beginning.

The prospect of homesteading brought back all the thrill of adventure that had passed out of my life with Diamond Dick literature. I was a boy again under a tree in the old orchard, seeing into a wonderland of enchantment—and freedom. The whole outlook delighted me—and Mother Lattig could cook! How she did it I cannot imagine,



Mother Lattig

but the savory soup and the delicious stew she had evolved from the most ordinary ingredients the evening before had been a revelation to me.

I decided to locate my house at the foot of the butte—Coyote Butte, Mother Lattig called it, because the coyotes collected there nightly to howl—then returned to the Lattig ranch. The old lady stood waiting for me in the doorway. She was broadly beaming now—she was not alone, and she was to have neighbors.

Three weeks later I saw two white spots moving slowly through the sagebrush from the south and I knew that our neighbors were coming in. I called the old lady to the doorway to see for herself. She stood there, shading her eyes and gazing hard at the white spots; she began to cry and then to laugh; I wondered if she would be able to endure the joy of having a “woom” in the valley. To help control her overflowing emotions I suggested that she get dinner ready for them. “They will be good and sick of camp fare,” I said. “You cook up a great pot of goulash and I will ride out to meet them and extend the invitation.”

“How many?” she asked, her eyes kindled to two points of flame.

She knew, but she must have it all over again. “Let’s see,” I began, counting them off on my fin-

gers, "old man Clark and his wife and Ed McKenzie and his wife and two children and Jim Urdahl and his wife and four children and—and Susie."

"That's thirteen—bad luck!"

"We'll change it. I'll eat with them. I'm empty now thinking of that goulash."

"Maybe dey bring someone else, too. Who's Susie?"

"Susie is old man Clark's youngest daughter."

"She not married, no?"

"No."

"Mebby bimeby she marry my boy Tom, den I have whole heaps of grandchildren—yes?"

I don't know why I resented this, but I was aware of feeling resentful. Why did everyone have to marry or talk of marrying? "Susie is only a child," I said irritably. "She's just sixteen."

"Child! huh! Pretty queek she grow up," and the old lady went in to start her cooking, tossing meanwhile an imaginary baby in her arms.

It was not necessary that I sit down with our dinner party to change the luck. The Clarks had, somewhere in the wilderness to the south, picked up Bullpit. As near as I could make out, the last load of suckers the Ratter had carted down into his rim rock proposition had left him with a disinclination for further "ratting" of that order. Nosing a

spring-filing boom, he had abandoned his party and joined the Clarks to look over the home-steading opportunities of Happy Valley with a view to locating future homeseekers there. He had been traveling horseback but had apparently handed his horse over to Susie. She rode gaily into the Lattig enclosure, slipped to the ground before her mount was at a standstill, and dropped the reins over his head in western fashion. Then she joined me for the walk up to the door, where the old lady, held steadfast by her interpretation of decorum, was tugging at every string of etiquette that held her in her eagerness to greet a "woom."

Susie rode in the loose, swinging, relaxed manner of one who has grown up in a cattle country; I liked her at once, and when she sprang to the ground and joined me instead of Bullpit, I liked her still better. She resembled her father—she was short, strong, and muscular, and as straight as an arrow, with a quick energetic walk and a perfectly self-reliant air. She was extremely fair, in spite of long exposure to sun and dust; she had that firm, thick, white skin that does not tan or burn, and her hair was flaxen. But her eyes were dark blue and deep set, the lids caught down oddly at the corners, and fringed with black lashes. They twinkled like stars when she laughed. Really, she was a surpris-

ingly pretty girl, just emerging from childhood, and older than most girls of sixteen. I could see that she was already amusing herself with Bullpit. Her joining me had not indicated a preference for me so much as a preference for teasing.

Mrs. Clark looked all her husband claimed for her — “the best woman on earth” — motherly, expansive, capable, and wholesome; while the other women, the wives of Ed and Jim, were younger editions of their mother, forever busy with one or another of the eternally active tow-headed children. I felt at once that there was a quality in Susie which the rest of her family lacked. I couldn’t quite place it. It might have been that she had had better advantages, having been in a city school the past five years. This had modified the type, no doubt. Even her dress had a distinctly individual air. She wore a chic little blue middy-blouse, a short blue serge skirt, and just above her small pink ears rested huge bows of blue ribbon. She had nice slim ankles and small feet well shod in flat school-girl shoes of tan. I thought to myself that even Ennis could not object to Susie, and then I dismissed the thought. What was Ennis to Susie, or Susie to Ennis?

I did my best to treat Bullpit cordially, for I knew he was really not to blame for the rim rock sale, and neither was he to blame for my recent debauch,

which I chose to forget altogether. And at all events he would soon be going on to Two Forks.

All through dinner old man Clark talked and laughed and told quaint stories on his family, and every time Mother Lattig passed his way he would pat her broad back, and say, "Oh, but she's a fine woman, a woman who can cook like that! There'll be stars in her crown." And then he'd have another helping of goulash, and brag about how much he could still eat. Mrs. Clark declared she would have to get the recipe or there would be no keeping him at home, and Susie wanted to know, prettily, if she could come over sometime and learn how to make all those interesting Hungarian dishes.

"I would have graduated in domestic science if we had stayed in town," she said, proudly. "I'd had two whole years in high school."

"And you'll have your domestic science yet, honey," said her mother consolingly.

"Yes, with the best teacher on earth, her ma," said old Clark with paternal firmness. The mother shot him a reproving look, and Susie's head went up a trifle more erectly; her tiny, pointed chin went into the air, and I knew at once that her ambition for further education was a bone of contention in the family.

"We'll have a graded school here in no time; just you watch my smoke," bragged the old man.

The next morning I rode on to the group of homesteads with the men and helped pitch tents and start a temporary camp, while the women remained with Mother Lattig. We left them looking at the garden. It was freshly planted. No green shoots were yet showing, but there were the little ridges of soil that indicated where the seed had gone into the ground, and empty paper bags stuck over stakes at the end of each row indicated what had been planted, and it was all very exciting. Never before in its age-long evolution from rock had human hand disturbed this soil.

When we returned that evening, I heard news. Bullpit had decided to take up the land between mine and Mother Lattig's, and had gone on to Two Forks to make his filing.

CHAPTER V

SUSIE OF THE STAR EYES

ONE spring day when a boy of nine or ten, having played hooky from school, I ran off to a park not far from home where a creek bubbled joyously over gleaming white stones, and tadpoles were to be found. I waded, caught tadpoles, and finally lay on the bank with my feet dangling in the water, and gazed up at the yellow-green of the young leaves. It was a world of golden haze, all dreams and sweet unreality.

I remember feeling, when the sun went down and I knew that I must go back home, that I had stolen a day out of dreamland. The contrast with the world I must return to, a fearsome woman-world where half-hidden phantoms of disaster were forever casting gloomy shadows, brought such a sense of horror and dread that I could scarcely force myself to go back. The fear of the whipping I should receive—the double whipping, for I should catch it both at school and at home—was nothing to the dread of that gloomy, trouble-haunted household.

The spring in Happy Valley brought back to my

mind the long-lost day of my boyhood. I experienced the same gloriously unhampered sense of personal freedom and timelessness; it was a timeless world in a dateless eternity. Day after day I grubbed sagebrush, which, on the suggestion of Mother Lattig, I stacked for winter fuel, and evening after evening I returned to the Lattig cabin tired to the point of exhaustion, hungry, smelling of earth and sweat, but with a clean soul-and-body washed feeling. I was tired in every cell, a healthy animal tired. I ate ravenously and greedily, hardly pausing between mouthfuls, and I was glad to fall on to my bed immediately after supper. We seemed far removed from the world that had always been such a trouble, the world that worried and sobbed and prayed and blamed and cared. Nobody here worried. Each one was tremendously busy. It was a veritable ant-heap of industry; no one had time to worry; each one just worked and sang.

I went over to the Clark settlement, which Susie had dubbed Tenttown, frequently, helping now and then with water hauling, well-digging, fencing, and excavating for the dug-outs. Mrs. Clark cooked for the whole settlement, her married daughters grubbed sagebrush with their men, and the tow-headed, sun-bleached youngsters rolled about happily in the dust. Susie filled in everywhere. While the men were

digging the well she drove every other day to my spring for water. She handled a team skillfully and easily, her firm, strong, young wrists never seeming to weaken under the strain. Often she would grub sagebrush with her father nearly all day, and go for water late in the afternoon. Darkness would frequently come on while she was still miles away, and to guide her the home folks would start a sagebrush fire. Night after night the young girl, alone in an eternity of space, with nothing in nature to fix directions, would rivet her eyes on the column of lurid smoke and by it bring her team safely in.

She had her play times. As the bunch grass increased, wild horses and cattle began straying into Happy Valley. It was the greatest sport in the world for her to rope a wild pony and break him to the saddle. I would watch her as the pony bucked her off a dozen times, while her family, looking on, doubled up with laughter over her performance. It was the kind of "play" they had all been bred to, and Susie was only going back to the sports she remembered as a child. It never seemed to occur to anyone to check her. It was a part of life as they knew life and accepted it, and as I began to accept it.

I saw another side to Susie. She had her own small tent which stood beside her father's. One day she invited me in when entertaining the babies dur-

ing a windstorm. It was a pathetic little corner of girlhood. She had pinned her foolish trinkets on the walls. There were kodak pictures. Here was a group of high school boys and girls, caps atilt, looking saucy; there a fishing excursion with her father; and in many different attitudes, snapshots of a very good-looking youth with a pensive expression, and his camera swung over his shoulder. There were dozens of fancy candy boxes, cushions with high school monograms, pennants, ball game souvenirs and horns. She had, too, a music box, a poor, little, cheap affair that stuttered through most of its repertoire, and for which the babies clamored whenever a windstorm blew them indoors. When I asked for music, she rather disgustedly explained that all the records but one were scratched, the babies having used them for spinning plates in her absence. She didn't think I would care for the one good one, but she would put it on if I said so. I said so. It was a foolish love song:

*Some one to love and cheer you
Sometimes when things go wrong;
Some one to snuggle near you,
Some one to share your song.
Some one to call you sweetheart,
After the day is done;
Some one to kiss you,
Some one to miss you—
Just some one.*

"Take care of that one, Susie," I said, when she ran to snatch the record off at the finish.

She flashed about on me. "You're laughing at it!"

"I never felt less like laughing in my life." I think, young and inexperienced as she was, she realized that I spoke more seriously than the occasion warranted. Sometimes I would feel suddenly sick with sadness when with these natural, wholesome people. I don't try to explain it, but I was so apart from it all. Susie didn't say anything more, but she looked about for a perfectly safe place to stow away the record out of reach of forever prying little fingers.

They were working strenuously at Tenttown to get in a garden, for already it was evident that their problem was one of too many mouths to feed. Frequently—more frequently than they had counted on—one of the men had had to knock off work and go to Two Forks for supplies. Once a horse went lame and the supplies were delayed.

When I went over to Tenttown for a visit they had been living on beans for a week. They had run entirely out of flour, potatoes, bacon, and prunes, the main diet of the homesteader. But they were cheerful about it and laughed over Mother Clark's attempts at variety in beans. They were cheerful—

but hungry. Susie rode back to Mother Lattig's with me and we borrowed sufficient provisions to last till Ed should return. They were counting on a good summer garden and a large root crop to help out the coming winter. I marveled at their cheerfulness, for this ground had never before been broken, and how did they know it would raise a garden? Everything was an experiment.

Mother Lattig was deeply concerned over her garden. It was not so much an economic necessity with her as a veritable passion for making things grow. She was up by daylight and worked endlessly over the tiny spears of green. She knew every little leaf and all but named them. The garden was almost the sole subject of conversation between us. And then one morning I was awakened by a series of bellows, and rushing to my window, I saw her standing beside her garden, a picture of desolation. I pulled into my overalls and ran out to see what had happened.

"The damn jack rabbits!" she exclaimed, and broke into a volley of vituperative abuse.

Every little green leaf and spear had been bitten off close to the ground. They had waited, the thieves, till lettuce and onions and radishes were worth their raid. The old lady continued her lamen-

tations, cursing, sobbing, and praying all in one breath.

"We must get word to Tom to send you some rabbit wire," I suggested.

She turned the full volley of her outraged feelings on me: "Yes! one week to get heem word, mit luck; mebby he gone to Portland; mebby to Salt Lake; mebby to San Francisco; you don't cannot tell where he go in beeg car; then one week to get wire to Two Forks and one week to get heem down here; and all dese weeks my leetle garden—ah, God!" The throaty guttural imprecation told her despair.

I was deeply perplexed. I suggested riding over to Tenttown and asking Mr. Clark what we had better do. If the rabbits had nosed out our garden, they would theirs. It was a community problem. Our old man had been cheerful about the rabbits, pointing to the wild cabbage that grew, crisp and peppery, at the roots of the sagebrush. Mother Lattig had used it for salad and seasoning. There were tons of it and it should have satisfied the rabbits. I repeated, as she didn't hear in her loud wailing, my suggestion to ride over to Tenttown for advice.

"You don't cannot fence out rabbits mit advice," she cried, dropping her apron and throwing out her huge arms with a gesture of despair that would have

been the envy of a grand opera star. "We don't cannot do nuttings! Ah, God, my leetle garden!" She began to moan and sway and sob afresh.

"All the same," I said, "I'll ride over to see Mr. Clark."

I found Tenttown in equal if more restrained distress. The whole settlement down to Ed's youngest boy stood about a ruined garden. It was as if the rabbits had held off, planning a concerted raid. The wretches hadn't been satisfied to fill their plaguey little bellies, but had nipped off and left to shrivel up row after row of young green sprouts, every one of which had been watched with the closest interest from its first brave breaking through the virgin soil.

"Well, that settles it. We've got to have rabbit wire," Jim announced. Jim seldom talked, but when he did it was to some purpose. "We had oughta seen that from the start."

"We gotta have more'n rabbit wire; we gotta have settlers," proclaimed the old man, turning away from the scene.

"How will settlers help?" I asked. Some way I resented settlers. I didn't want the world to move into my paradise.

"Settlin' up the land just naturally drives 'em away. They die off every few years anyway, but in

between they thicken up. Every female rabbit means an increase of seventy that year. It's a problem that has got to be fought with settlers." He looked calmly over the immense sea of sage, in the center of which we were as a few drops. "Yes, we gotta have settlers."

"But right now," said the practical Jim, thinking of his four gaping mouths and a long year ahead, "we've got to have a garden."

"If it ain't too late to plant again," said Ed, "we'd better one of us go in for rabbit wire."

"Is it so expensive?" I asked.

"It's price will be just doubled by the time we get it down here," Ed informed me. "And that'll be two weeks at the latest. I could go to Two Forks and telegraph."

"Cash is getting mighty low," Jim murmured, and Susie heard.

"Dad, let me!" she demanded, walking up to the stout old man, her erect little head proudly in the air.

"Susie, you're gettin' to be a plum nuisance," the old man remonstrated, turning away.

"I could earn four a week, and besides, you wouldn't have to feed me. And the four would keep you and Ma so's you could go on working on the ranch. If you stop and go to work, where'll the

ranch be a year from now? We'll just be fed, that's all, and what's the use!" She followed him up.

"Susie, you're more trouble than all my money," the old man again remonstrated, and bit a piece off a wild cabbage leaf.

"Mr. Brent, don't you think I'm right?" She turned appealingly to me. "A lady up at Two Forks wants someone to take care of her baby and will pay four dollars a week. Oughtn't Pa let me go?"

It was a sudden shock; I had not thought of Susie in this class. I spoke sharply. "By all means, no!" Immediately I was ashamed of my words—but Susie, a domestic in another's house!

"Susie's not a-goin'," her mother said stubbornly, coming over and putting her strong, brown, hard, old arm about the girl, crushing in her clean, white middy blouse. "I had Susie for myself and I'm a-goin' to keep her for myself. When Clark got this pioneerin' fever, I says, 'You can set me down anywhere so long's I have my children about me.' That's what I said and that's the terms I come in on—and Susie's not a-goin'!"

"Hurrah for Mother Clark," I cried, exultant over the firmness of her chin.

"Of course Susie ain't," said Jim. But the problem of finance remained just where it was. The

rabbit wire was an expense not counted on. The two thousand dollars had evidently dwindled more rapidly than had been expected, and to buy rabbit wire would leave the cash so low as to make pioneering risky. One or more of the men would have to go away and get work in order to finance the others.

I rode home late that afternoon, Susie going blithely along to console with Mother Lattig. She was naturally a merry-hearted girl, and she belonged to a family that met its problems by hard work in the open, and when not at work, forgot the problems. She still wore her perky-blue bows over her ears, but the ribbons had been washed many times and were quite faded. I thought of asking Ennis to send her some fresh ones, and then I forgot Ennis. It was strange the way I felt toward my family during all those idyllic spring days in the great desert country. I wanted to shut them out. I was glad that we had no regular mail, glad there were no home letters for me. Ennis' occasional letter I would lay aside, dreading to open it, dreading its tone of waiting helplessness, dreading the cloud it invariably threw over my spirits. I didn't want any contact with life as I had known it. I wanted only this.

When we rode up to the cabin at sunset we saw a funny sight. A rope dangling with tin cans, bottles,

and bells was stretched around the small garden. Susie sprang down from her pony and ran at once to Mother Lattig.

The old lady had been resourceful. She flopped down on the ground to demonstrate her idea.

"I work heem like dis," she explained. "I bring out my blankets. I sleep here mit my dog Deek and my gun. I put my hand over de rope—like so—I stay awake, and when Mr. Rabbit come, I shoot heem. And when I go to sleep, I roll so," she illustrated it graphically, "and I set up de noise mit de bells and cans, and Mr. Rabbit, he white-livered coward, he run, like so!" She sat suddenly up and made a swift pass of one great brown hand over the other.

Susie sat down beside her, seriously impressed. It was no time to laugh. "I wonder now if we can do that, too," she said. "Our garden is so much bigger." She sprang up. "I'll ride home quick, and rig up a fence like that for ours. Mrs. Lattig, you're a genius."

"A genius? What for is a genius? I don't cannot know your languages."

"A genius," I said, "is a person who thinks and acts instead of waiting for someone to show him how."

"Then I suppose I'm a copy cat!" Susie whirled

about on me, her little pointed chin, that some way wouldn't take on sunburn, up in the air.

"You're an angel," I said, impulsively; and immediately wished I had not.

"Then I'll fly back to angeldom with the good tidings," she said glibly, though she blushed. I helped her to mount, realizing it was wholly unnecessary.

The old lady insisted on keeping her vigil alone, so I went to bed early, meaning to wake at midnight and relieve her. But I did not wake till morning, and then not till she came gloriously triumphant to my door.

"De rabbits did not get one leetle leaf!" she said, her deep throaty voice breaking with exultation.

Every night thereafter she kept watch. The little garden recovered, put out another installment of leaves, and came on its singing way up through the earth. But soon the vigil began to wear on Mother Lattig. After grubbing sagebrush all day, she was tired out at night and she could not keep awake. "My Deek, he can't keep awake either," she complained, shaking her head woefully. "It ees hard for Deek."

But still she would not allow me to relieve her, and I came to see that that garden was something very particularly her own. She was like a mother

with a sick child; she could not relax her vigilance even when another watched. So I left her to her charge and went on with my daily grubbing and my nightly sleeping.

In the meantime Mr. Clark had sent an order for rabbit wire. He had decided to fence thirty acres. The rope fence with its bangles of tin cans was keeping the rabbit hordes down, but it was too primitive a method to have permanent value.

And then I heard good news. The experimental station of the State Agricultural College would supply barley seed to homesteaders for planting twenty acres. I wanted the seed dreadfully. I wanted to see what my soil would do. And here I must confess to a piece of cowardice. I was afraid to go to Two Forks to get the seed. I was afraid to break back into that world I had known. Susie asked me why I didn't take one of the horses and ride in.

"Well, you know I am here to look after Mother Lattig," I evaded.

"I will go over and stay with her."

"That isn't fair to your mother."

"Mother would want me to. Please go."

But I decided to do without the seed for the present and to continue grubbing. "It's hardly any use planting without rabbit wire," I said.

Susie sighed. Everything these days began and

ended with rabbit wire. Our first question had been, will things grow? They grew. Next, can we get in enough garden truck and roots to see the people and horses through the coming winter? The seed had been procured and planted, and everything had sprouted; and then there had to appear the rabbits!

I gave up all idea of planting that season, but I did begin to worry about cash. I must have at least a tent on my ground by September to comply with the government's requirement of residence. Where would I get the money?

One evening in June I found old man Clark working harder than I had ever seen him work before, though I had come upon him digging a well, plowing, grubbing, and breaking outlaw horses; he was trying to write a letter that would meet his ideal of just what such a letter should be.

"I'm writin' to the biggest newspaper in Oregon to them discontents walkin' the city streets, tellin' 'em about homesteadin'. I want to tell 'em I'll locate any man free who'll come into the country with a settled purpose to make a home; to take up Uncle Sam's dare that you can't do it. I want to make it plain that I'm just a-wantin' the country settled, and that it ain't no picnic, but pioneerin' right, and that if they'll come into Happy Valley,

we'll help 'em get a start and put 'em on as good a piece of land as they is, without charge."

I sat down at the table, where he had pushed aside a fresh baking of bread, and took the pen from him. Susie leaned on her elbows on the other side of the table, and I noticed that her ribbons were very much faded. Susie must have some new little perky bows to top her pretty pink ears.

"Well, man, write," the old man prompted impatiently, and with a start I bent to the task. Susie and her father watched every stroke of the pen, as they had every other task since coming into Happy Valley. There were few privacies in the Clark compound.

When I had finished, the old man read the letter, and his eyes lighted up. "My, but that's great. That'll fetch 'em."

Susie leaned against her father's shoulder and read it with him. "Can't he write good, though?" she exclaimed, looking her admiration.

The foolish praise pleased me—there was so little among these people that I could do "good." Mother Clark turned out her last baking of bread, and leaned over "father's" shoulder. She sighed and shook her head. "It's nice to be a scholar," she said. "Susie, she always wanted to be a scholar."

"And she'll be one yet," declared our old man. "We'll have a graded school in here in less'n' a year. Susie shall be a scholar. You watch my smoke!"

Susie was still gazing at me with admiration in her fair face. An old trouble had stirred. She sighed and looked away. The letter was sent off with Ed, who was going to Two Forks for the rabbit wire which they figured must be there by that time.

The first answer the old man got from his public letter rather alarmed him. He was game—he wouldn't own up, but—eight children! He looked at the six rolling around in the sagebrush, all healthy and fat with monumental appetites—and he thought of eight!

"It wouldn't be so bad if they didn't get so all-fired hungry," he said, ruefully scratching his stubby-bearded face.

"You goin' to let 'em come, Pa?" Mrs. Clark was a steadying force for this pioneer enthusiast. She was plainly against it.

"From this letter, they're already on the way—the letter's two weeks old. It's a Dutch name—Schrieber." I had the letter now.

"If they've got money enough—holy smoke!" He interrupted himself and sprang to his feet.

"Eight added to six makes fourteen, and all we need's ten!"

"Pa, have you gone clear out of your head?"

"And Susie makes fifteen!"

"Pa, what are you drivin' at?"

"You bet I'll let 'em come. We got our school; now all we need's a teacher!"

"School!"

"Where?"

"How?"

And the thought flashed into my mind, "I'll teach it—it will supply the cash for my 'residence.'"

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CHAPTER VI

THE COMING OF BULLPIT

BEFORE I formed the thought into words, galloping hoofs came to a stop before the tent. There was a loud halloo, and Susie, with the children at her heels, ran up the steps of the dugout to see who it was. They pushed back the tentflap: Bullpit, astride his horse, smiled down on the group — Bullpit, in a ready-made spring suit of reddish brown, with new brown leather leggings that gave his thin flat calves a chubby roundness, a golden brown tie beneath his receding chin, and a jaunty imitation panama hat thrust back from his forehead, displaying his thick, coarse, red hair.

He wore fringed gauntlet gloves, and he carried a shiny new whip, while a coil of stiff new rope was looped about his saddle horn. He was distinctly decked out. For whose benefit? My eyes rested quickly on Susie. She stood on the step, gazing up, evidently pleased with his very shiny appearance.

"Well, I've come home." He dismounted with engaging showiness. He thrust back his coat and ran his hand into his pocket, displaying a waistcoat

of straw-colored brocade. His entire attitude said, "Some get-up, eh? Some class to this caller, eh?"



Bullpit

He turned quickly and untied a gunny bag from his saddle, from which he produced a very pink box of candy for Susie.

"Well, Mr. Bullpit, come right in," Mother Clark said, while the old man went off into a peal of laughter. "Goin' to homestead in them clothes?" he asked.

The children were greedily attached to Susie who had retreated into the tent and was untying the knot with some difficulty.

"No, my pack animal is along." He waved his hand grandiloquently as though he had said my cortege. We looked back and saw a very disconsolate and plainly ribbed mule nibbling at the grass. Bullpit then came down the steps slowly, making a pause at each step, all self-consciousness, principally of his leather calves. "My friend," he said, smiling but shaking a finger at our old man, "I've got a crow to pick with you. What kind of a neighbor

are you, anyway, running a man out of his lawful business? I've a mind to sue you."

Our old man was plainly taken aback, for under the bantering was a current of seriousness.

"I had a fine lot of settlers ready to come in—would have netted me one hundred dollars apiece for locating them. I meant to bring them all down here, neighbors for you, give Happy Valley the benefit. And now you come out with that offer to locate any man free who wants to come in—and my business vanishes like—." He puffed and gestured into the air in an airy manner. But his eyes came quickly back to our old man who, for once, was silent.

"Tough on a chap," he shrugged his shoulders, "to see his business go up in smoke. Specially after I'd spent some little money getting them interested, getting them in the mood to come way off down here. I said to them, I says, 'It's a long distance, but there are compensations;' that's just what I said. I said, 'Look at me. I've got this whole inland empire to choose from, and where do I go to take up land? Why, right down in the heart of Happy Valley beside old man Clark;' that's what I said. And they would have come, and paid the fee gladly; it's worth it; it's charged all over, and more. And I'd a done white by 'em too, mighty

white. I'd a brought 'em in and taken 'em back in automobiles to do their filing, that's what I would have done. But—" he again shrugged and made the gesture significant of all having gone up in smoke. "You're wanting to play philanthropist, Mr. Clark. You're wanting to take care of other folks' families, while yours—" He cast his eye about the dilapidated tent, already pitted with holes where sparks from the cookstove had lighted.

"But that's the way with some men," he shrugged again. "Me now, I'm different. I'm there as quick as the next one to lend a helping hand, but I don't drag my—my family if I had a family—in the mire with me while I'm holding out the helping hand. In other words, I mean to make a home down here in your midst, a good home, for a good woman. The kind of a home a man has a right to ask a nice girl to share; that's what I mean to do, and I needed the money, but—" Again that expressive shrug and gesture.

Our old man was clearly nonplussed. He sat down on a barrel head and rested his chin in his hands.

"I'm right down sorry, Bullpit," he said, at last. "I'm dinged if I'm not right down sorry. I never thought of doin' another out of his job. I just thought—."

Bullpit sprang blithely up—he had perched on the corner of the table and turned his leather calves well out—and slapped our old man familiarly on the shoulder. “Never you mind, old man, I’ll pull through some way. I’ve brought in supplies enough to last me till I’ve established residence and got a little plowing done, then I can go back to town and get a job at any old thing. But I did want to stay. Gosh, but the air’s sweet down here!”

He strode to the tent opening and looked up to the square of out-of-doors, then turned suddenly as though dismissing Elysium. “But we’ll let bygones be bygones”—he thrust out his hand to our old man—“and not say another word about it. Not another word; no, not another word.” He fanned the air with his refusals, but he needn’t have been so persistent, for poor old Clark had nothing to say.

“Where are the settlers now?” asked Susie, looking at him levelly, her sharp little chin well up, the candy box still unopened. I could see she was nettled by the position her father had been put in, though she hadn’t quite analyzed the matter. As for myself, I wanted to take the wretched little wart and nip him off the face of our fair Valley.

“Pa never was one to look out for number one,” Mrs. Clark commented pepperly. “It ain’t Pa’s

way. Of course, he could have charged them one hundred dollars apiece, too. But it ain't Pa's way."

Bullpit turned jauntily on her. "Soft, soft, my dear Mrs. Clark. You couldn't get one hundred after they got down here. You have to have them deposit it at Two Forks to your credit before you take them to see the land. Then if they file, it's yours. You wait till they get down here all alone, unpiloted, and what strings have you on their hundred? No, Pa couldn't have worked it."

"Where are the settlers now?" persisted Susie, her little pointed chin still up.

"Why, don't you see—" Bullpit floundered and looked about from one to the other, "don't you see—well, just naturally when I found myself done out of—" he counted it on his fingers—"one, two, three, four, five—yes, five hundred dollars—enough to have started me beautifully on my homestead over by our friend here"—he gestured toward me—"I naturally, you see, felt pretty sore and done up, don't you see, and I just got together my traps and came along. I left the settlers to do as they pleased."

"Pa's settlers?"

"Well, yes, they'd seen that letter in the paper, and they just bundled up and came without waiting for further word."

"Then they weren't your settlers; they were Pa's."

"They'd have been mine, don't you see? For I am at every stage watching for newcomers. They'd have come anyway, as it was in their blood, the land fever. They've been thinking about it all year—and longer—no doubt. That letter just started them coming this way."

"Still, after all, they were Pa's settlers."

He made his expressive gesture and again laughed.

"Pa's settlers; by all means, have it that way."

"That's the way it is." Susie persisted, her chin higher; but her mother said, "Come, come, Susie, don't argue," and Bullpit went over and asked her for a chocolate cream. She pointed to the floor where the pink box was a center of interest for six besmudged, messy youngsters. I turned away to hide a smile. Some way, I felt better.

But the next minute my satisfaction vanished. Clark was telling Bullpit of his plan for a school. It seemed that by reason of certain school land sales, all they had to do to get a good-sized piece of school money was to organize a district. With the eight children on the way, we would have fifteen pupils, and a district required but ten. Our old man was for organizing the district as soon as the settlers got

in. They could throw up a shack of the lumber Tom Lattig had sent down to build a cabin on his mother's homestead, then they could move the old lady into the new shack so she could protect her claim, and rent the present cabin of her for a school-house. The old lady must get on her land pretty soon; the son would be mighty pleased to have his neighbors put up the shack and move his mother into it, and thus make it possible for her to keep her obligations to Uncle Sam, who required residence as well as cultivation. It would work out beautifully. All he needed now was a few more settlers, and the man with his eight children who, he thought from the tone of the letter, was already on the way, was a godsend.

All through his recital Bullpit kept interjecting, "A capital idea!" "Such resourcefulness!" "Clark, you're a wonder!" "If we had more settlers like you."

Finally he said, "And how much do you figure you can pay the teacher?"

"Well, I don't know yet just what's comin' to us, but judgin' from what I heard up at Two Forks about the school funds, we ought to be able to pay sixty dollars a month for three months now, then toward next spring, mebbly three more months. I'd say not less than sixty dollars. It'll be hard, mebbly,

gettin' a teacher, a right good teacher, to come down here and teach a pioneer school and live in a tent."

Bullpit was thoughtfully pulling at his lower lip, making it now into a coal scuttle, now letting it go back in its accustomed buttonhole. "Um, yes, that will be some problem, getting a teacher to come down into homestead land and live in a tent. Um—yes." Suddenly a brilliant idea struck him. He sat up as straight as a jumping jack pulled by its string, while his eyes flashed. I noticed how red the rims were. "How'd I do?" The old man looked at him queerly, not taking him seriously.

"But no, I wouldn't ask for it. It would be too much like saying, 'You've done me out of my own business, now help me out a little with your patronage.' No, it would be too much like that. I wouldn't ask any favor of any man, much less a man that might feel sort of obliged to grant it. No, I won't give it another thought." He got promptly up and strode bravely toward the door, then turned. "I'll go on to my homestead. I want to get settled before dark. The latch string will always be out to all the Clarks, and a welcome as big as a barn over the door. Good-bye for the present!"

He ran up the steps very much as a vaudeville performer runs off the stage.

"Wait, wait, Mr. Bullpit." It was Mother Clark. She began wrapping up a loaf of her warm bread and pushing it into a flour sack. "Take this along to save you bakin' tonight."

He turned, and a beatific smile, all recognition of a sweetly gracious act in a world otherwise hard and cold, swept over his red face. "Ah, but that is dear of you."

He now spoke directly to me for the first time since his blow-in. "I presume you are nicely settled with a good little house on your homestead, Brent?"

"No," I informed him, "I have not yet established residence."

"No?" he frowned, and then smiled. "But there is still so much land, one is comparatively safe. However, Uncle Sam must be obeyed or we will get in trouble, specially with land with a spring on it. Very attractive, that spring. Well, once more, adieu." He was gone.

Susie rose straight up from the midst of the messy kids, her eyes flashing. "Pa, you're not going to let him teach our school?"

"Why, no, honey, I hadn't thought about who'd teach it. We'll be regular. We'll let it be known we want a teacher, and then choose the best out of the applicants. That's the regular way."

"Because, if you were—." Her eyes were militant.

I spoke. "I had thought of making application myself," I said, "But Susie rather scares me."

"I wish you would!" cried Susie, turning on me. "I'd love to learn to write—like you!"

"Now, why didn't you speak right up when we first talked about it?" demanded Mother Clark regretfully. "I know how Pa is when he thinks he's injured a man, and it'll be just like Pa—."

The old man threw his hands to his head as though fighting away buzzing hornets, and made for the door. "We ain't got no district yet, or no schoolhouse, or no pupils, or—hello!"

He stopped short off on the top step and we all ran up back of him. There were not enough changes of scene on our landscape to miss even one. There, not a mile away, was a white prairie schooner, and coming down the far mountain side were three white specks that meant others.

"Settlers!" cried the old man, in a voice that choked. "Settlers!"

Mother Clark, standing beside him, her arms folded in her apron, and her eyes fixed on the far distance, said, "I wonder if there's any women!"

'And Susie, "I hope there's some girls my age!"

I had stepped outside the tent, and now turned

back to the little group in the doorway. The tent looked so small, the people so few, and the land so mighty!

"Billy ain't sayin' nothin'," the old man noticed.

"I'm hoping for children; for I'm in earnest about wanting that school," I told him. Susie turned quickly to me with a happy smile.

CHAPTER VII

PA'S SETTLERS

OUR old man sized up our first settlers well enough for all practical purposes: "They ain't very pretty and they got odd ways about 'em, but they'll do."

They certainly weren't pretty. An old man drove the first outfit that drew up before the Clark tent. He was no older, perhaps, than our old man, but oh, so sad. His eyes were big and mournful and mostly on the outside of his face. His mouth was wide and thin and drooped pitifully at the corners. He continually chewed, working his big, flat, angular jaw, and this produced a sort of rotary motion of his long nose. He wanted to know, before getting down, how much we charged for meals. Our old man took it as a huge joke, and slapped his stout thighs and laughed till I thought he would explode, while the settler solemnly chewed on, working his jaw and his nose.

On the seat beside him sat a man who had not lifted his head from a book he was reading. He seemed bent on finishing the chapter. He was clean

shaven, small, dark, slick, and neat in spite of the dust. I could imagine him near the entrance of the Emporium at home, saying, "This way, ladies." At last he lifted his head, and apparently discovered for the first time that the team had stopped, that a tent was before him, and that a group of human beings had some way been belched up from the earth to a spot within the focus of his eyes. He took us in without surprise or question, carefully marked the place in his book, laid the book beside him on the wagon seat, and asked, "Have we, then, arrived?"

"Yes; conductor a little slow about callin' the station," our old man answered, chuckling. "Alight, friends; get down and come right in; mother'll give you some hot coffee and fresh bread, and I guess there's some ham and potatoes that won't go bad, eh, mother? Get down, friends; get down."

The old driver chewed on. "First, I want to know what it's going to cost me. Food for self and one-half the team. My friend here pays for himself and the other half."

"Not a copper, friend; not a copper. Get down, get down; you must be stiff with settin'."

The old man climbed out with a spryness of which I would not have believed him capable. His companion took another look at his book, then got down reluctantly.

"My name's Sneed; Sol Sneed. And this is Mr. Howard, who I fell in with at Ossing. We joined forces and shared expenses. I'm from up Vermont way, and Howard's from Boston. We're here to take up your offer to be located, free; you understand, free! I'd like it in writing."

Again our old man went off into a spasm of laughter, while Mrs. Clark's head went up stiffly, and Susie looked to me with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Come, Susie," said her mother, starting down the steps. "We'll get dinner goin'."

I offered to peel the potatoes, but Susie shook her head. "You'd peel 'em too thick; we have to almost scrape 'em; my goodness, but I'll be glad when the new ones come and we can have enough potatoes at any rate." She ran down the steps.

I turned to the man from Boston, who had again picked up his book and was deep into it. I think he had not cast a solitary glance at the country, the tent—not even at Susie.

"Good yarn?"

He lifted his small, steady, black eyes, and regarded me as the dirt under his feet; no, he had not looked at the dirt under his feet. I must find another figure. Never mind; he looked at me, and after a long stare vouchsafed the information: "It is *Bledstoe on Dry Farming*. I am told that this

section has thirteen inches of rainfall; Bledstoe says thirteen inches is enough for dry farming; I am told that this is mostly sagebrush land with very little greasewood; Bledstoe says that is the proper land for dry farming; I am told small grains will do well here; according to Bledstoe—.”

“Why, yes; they’ll do fine; we have enough samples coming on to demonstrate that. Come on out and see our little experimental sta-



The Book-farmer

tion. The rabbits have taken a good deal of it, but you can see that everything is coming on thriftily, even the vegetables.”

He followed me rather regretfully, his finger still keeping his place in Bledstoe. He gazed at the garden ruefully, and the fence bothered him.

“Bledstoe says nothing about fencing of this peculiar nature.”

He seemed to want to dispute the fence, and yet

it was there. I turned away to hide a smile, and saw Susie watching us from the back of the tent. Throwing her wicked hands to her wicked mouth, she ran on around the tent, out of sight, to hide her amusement. I sobered as best I could and gave my attention to our settler.

"Bledstoe possibly has left out many of the facts of pioneering," I suggested.

"Nevertheless, I shall be governed by Bledstoe!" he defied me. "I think I have read everything written on dry farming. You possibly do not know the advantages of Boston's public library."

"Possibly not," I murmured, and followed him, for he had turned away from our fence and headed back toward the tent.

Our old man was talking with Sneed, who seemed gloomier than ever, and laying before him his idea of the valley's settlement. "The main road through the country," he said, "bein' right along here and already established, decides the trend of travel; it will all come this way. There's a considerable valley on south that'll be settled later. Naturally, settlers will make for the center of the valley. You'd have a chance to sell supplies to all those comin' and goin', and if I see things right, there's goin' to be right smart of a settler movement this spring; then there's the sheep men; they buy supplies in big

quantities, and now they have to go to Two Forks for everything. They'd be glad of a store down here."

A store! Was our old man crazy? Or did his eyes really see true? Howard was not listening. He had found a soap box and lost himself in Bledstoe. Susie called dinner.

Sol Sneed limbered up and was the first one down the steps, his nostrils working at the smell of food. He pulled up a keg and sat down. Mother Clark got the rest of us seated in some way, and our old man started the dishes around the table. I saw now the advantage of the continual motion plan of Sol Sneed's jaw. The amount of ham and fresh bread and boiled potatoes and cream gravy that that cavernous jaw could handle, and that cavernous maw put away was tragic for a homesteader. I wondered if he had a family, and if they took after him—and if he had a good bank account.

The Book-farmer, for such Susie called him—and such he remained—ate absent mindedly, after having asked politely for a napkin. Once, some time afterward, he said to me, "It's peculiar, isn't it, what a fondness all these people have for cream gravy. I find it—I might almost say—indigenous to the country. Everywhere, they are eating this peculiar thickened substance known as cream gravy.

I would like to look it up — that's the drawback of being so far from a library; I would like to look up the foods of pioneer peoples, and see if there is anything about pioneering that makes the stomach crave this odd dish."

"It's just possible," I suggested, "that the fact of one cow to supply thirteen people, including six children, to say nothing of guests, has some bearing on the butter supply, and that cream gravy thus becomes a substitute not so much chosen as thrust on the pioneer."

He looked at me doubtingly, and said, "Possibly," but without a flicker of light in his face.

Ed and Jim were both busy plowing, so, after dinner, I went with Mr. Clark and our settlers to look for land. They knew no more than I had about finding corners, or choosing soil, and but for a constantly suspicious attitude on the part of Sol Sneed, who seemed under the hallucination that someone was going to do him out of something, were easily located. Our old man was pretty cute about it, locating Sneed some distance to the north of Tent-town. He suggested that, as our friend was to put in a small store of supplies, he had better be to the north of the valley's center in reach of settlers who might come down over the mountain and turn east or west rather than south. This located him fully

seven miles away, which was certainly near enough to old "What's-in-it-for-me," a name Susie gave him and which stuck. The Book-farmer took the first piece suggested to him. He accepted Mr. Clark's word, and that of Bledstoe. He was midway between Tenttown and the Lattig ranch.

We found another prairie schooner when we returned that afternoon, bringing our Dutch friend Schrieber, with his eight children and his stout wife. Already he was out skirmishing, digging into the soil, examining the sagebrush, tasting an outcropping of whitish powder to determine what kind of salts it contained, and on the scent of greasewood. He had decided on his land for himself, preferring, as had Clark, the center of the valley and three hundred and twenty acres, to a smaller ranch nearer the hills with possible irrigation. He would be a close neighbor to the Clarks.

"Right here I'll shtop mit me," he informed us.

Mother Clark, untiring in her hospitality, was in the midst of a still larger boiling of potatoes, frying of ham, and stirring of cream gravy. The eight children ranged from three to sixteen years, and Susie was happy over a girl just her age. She and little Dutch Leeda were already on terms of intimacy. Leeda was quaint and squat, with big, solemn, blue eyes and two tightly braided pigtails,

and each of the other little daughters of Dutchland was modelled after Leeda.

There is certainly character in dress. Some way, Susie never looked ordinary or commonplace. Though the blue ribbons were faded almost white, perky bows still perched jauntily above her ears, and though her middy blouses had had many washings, they carried a certain air all their own. I wondered if Leeda, in Susie's bows and middies, wouldn't really be quite a pretty girl; and I wondered just what poor little Leeda's fitted basque of dull red cashmere would do to Susie.

Luckily, the Dutchman had money. He indicated that he had enough to start ranching comfortably. He wanted to buy two good teams—his had gone lame on the way—so he and Leeda could each drive a team grubbing and plowing. It was late, but he meant to get in a garden and a good root crop for the coming winter. I was already accustomed to the capability of the Clark women folks, so I was not shocked at the Dutchman's matter of fact statement regarding Leeda. It was evident why he said Leeda instead of his wife. A ninth little Dutchman would soon add himself to our population.

CHAPTER VIII

DRINK DOES ITS WORK

THE coming of the Dutchman worked a hardship for me. I lost the use of Tom's horses. Mother Lattig, always with a shrewd eye for business, had been much concerned over the prospect of having to winter-feed her two teams, when they were doing no work to earn their board. So she sold them to the Dutchman, and I now had to make my trips to Tenttown afoot. This was particularly unpleasant owing to Bullpit's presence. He had set up a small brown government tent, and was digging around it with a show of grubbing sagebrush. He came often to Mother Lattig's and succeeded in stirring up my ire with his continual reminders that I had not established residence and that I had only till the first of September to do so. This in the face of the forty acres which I had cleared while he had merely set up a tent, nettled me. But it also pricked my sleeping content. It was perfectly true that I must establish some sort of residence by the first of September or any other settler coming in would have a right to jump my claim. Besides a tent or

a cabin, the law required that ten acres should be broken up ready for a crop. I had, however, a year in which to do this. It was useless to put in a crop without rabbit wire. If I could get the school, the one hundred and eighty dollars would meet all these requirements. I could think of no other way for I was not capable of earning that amount of money in two months. I would not apply to my grandfather save as a last resort.

Mother Lattig was delighted to accept the proposition of our old man to build her new cabin that we might rent the present one for a schoolhouse. I helped with this, doing my first carpenter work since manual training days. We moved Mother Lattig into the new cabin on her own land, two feet away from her son's residence, and proceeded with some of the smoother boards to make benches and desks. In a few months the benches would come out and the cabin would once more be the legal home of Tom Lattig, whom the government permitted to be away from his ranch to earn his living so long as his "family" remained on it. The old lady had four hundred dollars from the sale of her horses which she told me she had buried. Sometimes I was tempted to ask her to lend me money enough to buy a tent, but I hadn't the nerve. To borrow money of a woman—and when I had learned that she

made the money with which she came west cooking in a Hungarian restaurant in New York — well, I couldn't do it.

It is difficult to explain the horror that came over me at the very thought of leaving Happy Valley. I had been three months homesteading, and I felt healthy in body and mind. The air, always with a tang in it, had also a rough sort of character. It was like a big, bluff, well-meaning friend who caught you up on all your shortcomings and made you not only ashamed of them but able to forget them. Even the wind, which blew steadily and fiercely at times for days on end, sending sand particles biting into face and eyes and hands, even the wind had a toning influence. There was nothing soft and tender about this sagebrush country. There was nothing that petted and humored, nothing that nurtured defects. It was a strong, sturdy, battling country that fairly challenged one to fight. And always when at peace it was such a powerful peace. Sometimes when I would climb to the top of my butte, and throwing myself on the ground, look away to the vast spread of country, it would come to me as a huge canvas which God had stretched all empty and bare, waiting for man to paint there his pictures. And as I would lay with half-closed eyes, watching and dreaming, there would rise before me interminable

fields of waving grain, cattle grazing on all the hills, and here and there — not too close together — substantial farm houses, each sending tall columns of smoke up into the still air. A quick batting of the eyes, a sharp look around, and there would be the vast canvas, cleared for another picture. Nothing was ever in the way of one's dreaming.

My long day of hooky from the world's troubled school was undoubtedly too idyllic to last. I knew that it could not last. I must make some kind of a move. I must get money. But to pry myself loose, to thrust myself out of Arcadia, was more than I had the will to accomplish alone.

And so in the goodness of Providence, Bullpit was sent to do the prying. He came over one noon when I had been resting from a hard morning's work.

"You know you could sell a relinquishment for a pretty good price," he said, reading my problem. "Ranches with springs of sweet water are not so plenty now. I could get you a right good price, then you could take up three hundred and twenty out in the center there and dry farm."

"My ranch is not for sale," I said sharply.

"Have it your way," Bullpit shrugged. "I thought you needed the money. Of course if you're in funds I've nothing to say. Only you act queer

for a man in funds; you ain't doing much toward establishing residence by the first of September."

"It didn't seem to take you long," I retorted with a nod toward his insignificant little tent.

"It ain't the improvements you make, it's how well you keep within the letter of the law that counts."

"You think your tent would satisfy Uncle Sam better than my forty acres of clearing?"

"The letter of the law calls for residence, and a tent is accepted as residence. The amount of cropping don't count, that is, beyond the ten acres required each year."

"You'd better get busy on your ten acres then, as you respect the law."

Bullpit always annoyed me, even when, as in the present instance, he was really suggesting a practical way out. But I didn't want a ranch out in the valley; I wanted my own ranch here on the plateau, with Coyote Butte nosing down onto it. The spring alone was worth a fortune to me. It was the best water I ever tasted, clear and cold and pure and satisfying. I must have drunk gallons of it, daily. It seemed to quench my thirst as no other water did. And it was sufficient for irrigation.

I loved my ranch,—I would not give it up. All thought of appealing to my grandfather was dissi-

pated by a letter from Ennis. She informed me gloomily that she had had to dismiss the maids and was doing the housework as best she could with Claire's help. Claire was so mortified over their reduced circumstances that she would see no one. Grandfather had lost heavily on some investments and he was breaking. No, I could not write to him. Besides he had taken no interest in me since I had left home. I understood better, now, his bitterness toward me. He had needed help and he had relied on me—and I had failed him. I did my best to put him out of mind, and turned to my personal problem. By getting on my own feet, only, could I manage ever to help him.

I had hoped some of the new settlers would need an extra hand, but so far they were self-sufficient. The Dutchman had money, but also he had his private corps of little Dutchies. He had filed on a desert claim of three hundred and twenty acres adjoining his homestead, and had bought another three hundred and twenty with scrip, so that now he had nearly a thousand acres. Early and late he and Leeda worked with the teams, while his younger children stacked sagebrush for winter fuel. Tenting had appealed to all the settlers. Lumber would have to be hauled over one hundred miles, which made it costly to say nothing of the time and the

wear and tear on teams. And the main thing was to get the soil speedily into a crop. The Dutchman was intent on summer fallowing. He was able to buy such tools as he needed and put his labor directly into his soil. He would soon have a fine ranch.

Clark and his boys were not so well fixed. I could see that uneasiness over the lack of ready cash was beginning to shadow their blissful adventure. They had got rabbit wire and they had thirty acres in potatoes and other root crops. The garden was doing exceptionally well. The rabbits had made only a sort of thinning out that would have had to come sooner or later. Mother Lattig had invested in rabbit wire and had also saved her garden. The country was doing wonderfully, living up to our highest hopes. If only we had a little capital!

It was August before I summoned the nerve to put my problem plainly to Mr. Clark. I walked over to Tenttown one morning and found Susie engaged in taming a young coyote. One of the men had caught it in a trap, and Susie, who couldn't bear to see anything killed, had plead for its life. The flaxen headed babies were gathered about, in awed delight. Her father, she told me, was helping the Book-farmer.

I walked back to his place. He had made a good-

sized clearing and our old man was helping him plow. He was going to summer fallow, preparatory to sowing winter wheat. Nothing could induce him to plant so much as an onion or a head of lettuce until after the first fallowing. It was the advice of the book. He had been a mixer of drinks back of a Boston soda fountain, and mixing drinks does not give one the muscle needed for holding a plow steadily from sun up till sun set. He was glad to have help.

Another thing which had kept the Book-farmer unendingly busy was his need to follow the exact rules laid down in summer camp books for establishing his tenting quarters. I must confess to a wave of pure envy when I beheld his neat, well-staked tent and its orderly interior. Most of the settlers lived and worked out of doors and used their tents merely as a protection from the wind and for such necessities as cooking and sleeping. With the Book-farmer the program of life within his tent was as exact as that without. Nothing was omitted.

I took our old man to one side and had a serious talk with him about the school which was to begin in September. He had organized the district which was thirty miles long, but it was regular, with funds, and had been approved by the county court.

Our old man scratched his stubby chin and ap-

peared troubled. "There ain't a livin' thing in the way of it but Bullpit," he confessed. "He's been hammerin' away about that school all summer. If it hadn't a been for doin' him out of his locatin' fees—and his askin' first—ding it all, I'd like mighty well to see you teach that school, Billy."

I knew they had appointed three directors, Clark, the Book-farmer, and the Dutchman. I looked over to the Book-farmer methodically plowing, and doubted my appeal to him. We were not congenial spirits. I thought of the Dutchman. I had not been at much pains to cultivate his friendship, he being always busy. I remembered now that Bullpit had ridden over and helped him plow on several occasions. My prospects looked doubtful.

"You got a certificate?"

"No, but I don't think there will be much trouble about that. I am rather fresh from school, and scholarship was never a bugbear to me."

"That's right. I'd put money on your scholarship any day; that letter you wrote, now—say, Billy, I got it! You're pretty sure of your scholarship. Bullpit mebbly is and mebbly isn't. You'll both have to take the examinations. Why, man, you'll have to be gettin' right up to Two Forks. You both go take the examinations, and I pledge my

word to the one that makes the best grades. That's no more than fair!"

I agreed that that was fair.

"And I'll bring our friend here over to my way o' seein' it; he would kind o' respect grades, the Book-farmer," he added with a sly smile.

"I think he would," I agreed.

"Then go to it, and here's luck, boy!" He thrust out his horny hand. I grasped it. "Another thing, you'd oughta bring a tent down with you from Two Forks for you'll just about get back in time to establish residence by the first of September. I've sighted more homesteaders comin' in lately than you could shake a stick at. That watered piece of yours will look good to a man who don't understand dry farm-in'. I wouldn't run no risk if I was you. I'd bring a tent along down."

"I'll do that," I said. I remembered my watch and made up my mind to hock it in town for a tent. Surely I could get a tent for it. Then the steady blue-gray eyes of the cattleman who had put the Lattig-mother responsibility on me, came back and I felt cheered. If I could do nothing else I would appeal to him, to the man who had said that young men were an asset.

Every one was working full blast and every horse in our settlement was in use so it was a waste of

time to attempt to borrow a mount. I hiked it, Mother Lattig providing a generous lunch. I had never told her how short of money I was, and with her countrymen a one hundred mile hike was not unusual. She gave me just one commission. I think it had to do with the welcoming of the Dutch baby, an event she was looking forward to with the keenest interest — “a leetle babee in Happy Valley — Ah God!”

Van Vader gave me a hearty welcome. “Well, now, you’ve got some tan, and some flesh’s managed to stick to your ribs,” he said, scarcely disturbing his knuckles.

“But I’m as poor as ever,” I returned, drawing up a chair. “Mr. Vader, help me out. Who can I hock this watch to for some cash?”

“What you need o’ cash, homesteadin’? Grub?”

“No, not grub; but a cabin, you know, or a tent; and a bed and a chair and stove — you know, the usual thing. Mr. Vader, what about Mr. Regan? Do you suppose he would lend me fifty dollars on my watch?”

“He’s Uncle John to most every one hereabouts, but I do’ know as I ever heard of his lendin’ money on personal effects.”

“Is there any one else you can suggest?”

"I gotta first-rate tent out back, ain't doin' nothin,'—and a camp stove that you're plumb welcome to. You can return it when you get your cabin built."

"Mr. Vader, did you ever hear of a thing called self respect? Do you want to take mine entirely away?"

"We're needin' settlers. It's just as John Regan said; he'd say to give you the outfit, and you keep the watch; I'd not get mixed up with any cash if I was you. I'd just keep the watch."

"And continue stacking up a board bill with you," I added. I felt resentful. Why wouldn't Vader let me hock my watch? I knew, under it all, his idea, and I resented his lack of faith. Without cash a man can not very well drink. Already the fumes of liquor from the bar room were stealing over my senses. Already the Lattig cabin, the plateau ranch, the little Tenttown settlement seemed far away, misty, and unreal.

I left the hotel and went up to the Court House to look up the County Superintendent of Schools and find out about the examinations. They would begin the following morning and last for three days. On my return to the hotel I met Bullpit, brushed and shining, and smelling of perfume and whiskey. I sat down opposite Van Vader, and Bullpit joined us.

"Have something on it," he invited, nodding toward the door across which was scrawled in curlicues the word "Bar," "just to show there's no bad feelings. We're after the same job, Van, and the best man gets it. Neat little contest Pa Clark's pulling off between his favorite sons. Come, have something, Brent."

I shook my head; at the same time I felt like a fool—clinging to Van Vader as to a life line. Was I a man or a baby that I couldn't stand on my own feet!

Van Vader said nothing. Bullpit drew up a chair. Our feet all pointed toward the rusty red, cracked stove, the target for many chews. I suddenly got up, but there was no place to go. I could walk the length of the one main street of the little gray cattle town and pass the swinging doors of five saloons and three hotels, each with a bar. There was no club, no loafing place, nothing but the empty, dusty street and the limitless gray plains. I went to the door. A huge wall of dust cut off distance—a wind storm was rising. I turned back to the stove. It was now three o'clock. It would be nine before I could with any sort of reason go to bed. I wondered if there was a public library where I might read away the afternoon.

I went out into the howling wind, the door bang-

ing behind me, and ducking my head and holding fast to my coat, pushed down the street. The loafers were all in doors, the post-office was full of men waiting for the daily stage. I was not interested in the mail. Ennis' letters usually filled me with uneasiness even before I broke the seal; and though I tried to tell her about ranching and the ranch people in a way that would interest her, I never felt that she understood or was in the least interested. She was interested in me—I was her brother—but not in my way of living. I saw a newspaper office—I would try that. A foreman was busily sorting type before a hand press. I asked for the editor; he jerked his head toward a door. I pushed it open. The editor sat at a desk, writing—a thin, nervous, wiry man of middle age, with a long reddish mustache streaked with gray. He looked up and I liked his face.

“I'm looking for something to read,” I said. “I wondered if there was a public library in town.” I picked up a newspaper. “This will do, if I may loaf here awhile.”

“Make yourself at home. Let's see, you're Brent, aren't you?”

“Yes, homesteading in Happy Valley. I'm here to take the school examinations. I'll be glad when they're over and I can pull out.”

"I'd like to do that myself, get away on a ranch for a while. Any news from Happy? We're just about to go to press."

I told him of our new settlers and the plan for a school to begin in September. He wrote.

"You're to teach it?"

"Don't put that in," I hastened to say, "I hope to teach it. The teacher is not yet elected."

The office was restful; the editor was a man of education, a gentleman. His atmosphere radiated that. I sat on, while he wrote, and read every line of the little sheet, including an ad of Van Vader's in which he maintained that he served good "clean" meals. At length the editor carried his stuff in to the foreman.

"That's done for a week," he said, returning with an air of relief. I wondered how so small a paper could be so great a burden. I spoke of John Regan—the loan was still on my mind.

"The only thing against John Regan," said the editor, "is that he is so damned good; but he's so damned fine you can overlook that. Come, let's get something to drink," he added, pulling into his coat.

I do not know why I couldn't speak plainly to this man whom I liked and who was intelligent, about the effect of liquor on me. I dissembled. I ran my hand into my pocket and drew out several dimes and

nickels. "My entire cash fortune," I said. "I'm not spending money."

"It's on me," returned the editor. "What's a drink more or less? It'll be on you next time, perhaps."

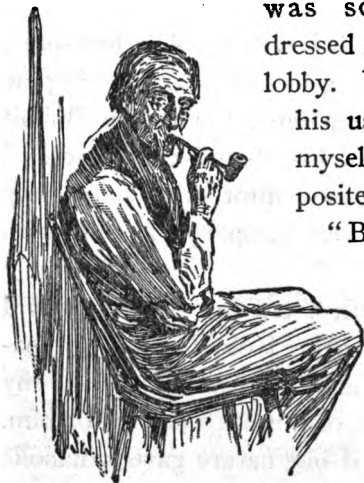
I liked the man, and I was terribly lonesome. The thought of his closing that office and setting me adrift again in the dilapidated town with Bullpit haunting my trail was more than I could face. I wanted to stay with the editor who some way harmonized. He was real company; I went with him.

Any man cursed with a craving for liquor will understand what followed. I don't expect sympathy—only understanding. The editor was of my class in more ways than one, unfortunately for him. To have a companion of like nature gave a diabolic luxuriance to the abandon to drink. He told me, half drunk, his troubles, chief of which were his sprees between issues of the paper, and I suppose I told him mine. And then we would have another drink on it. Had it only been some one's duty to haul us out and chain us to our beds—but no, it could not have been done after the first drink. Nothing could have saved that night. I don't believe there is any influence, any appeal on earth, that can hold a man's lips away from liquor after a first

glass—an alcoholic's, I mean—until he is soused and stupefied with it.

Four days later, I crawled out of my blankets at Van Vader's, nauseated and exhausted. Though it

was scarcely daylight I dressed and dragged out to the lobby. Van Vader sat there in his usual attitude. I flung myself down in a chair opposite.



Van Vader

“Better eat somethin’,” he said. “How’d an egg, poached tender, and some strong coffee, set?”

I suppose I was a maudlin fool. His patience—something—I don’t know

what—but any way, the tears rolled down my cheeks. I could not control them.

“Shoot me, don’t feed me,” I said, bitterly. “Take your gun and shoot me.”

But already he was ambling toward the kitchen.

The large fly-specked calendar on the wall marked this day as the first of September. I had lost my claim—that is, if any one wanted to make me lose

it. I had not established residence, and furthermore, had I the time, I could not now establish residence, for during that idiotic four-days' spree my watch had gone, and I had in its place only an old gun that I had acquired, I know not how. I hadn't the nerve to accept Van Vader's tent, and I had no way of getting it down to the ranch should I take it. My plan to raise money on my watch had included hiring a pack animal. But I now had nothing to pawn, no resources.

But as I ate Van Vader's egg, "done tender," I began to come out of the blackness, and to wonder if there wasn't even yet some way. I remembered the lean-to of Mother Lattig's cabin. We had unjoined it, meaning to move it over to the new cabin, but we had not finished the job. I knew if I told the old lady of my predicament, she would permit me to haul the lean-to over to my ranch, and this would meet Uncle Sam's requirements for the present. If, then, I could only get back to my ranch, I could manage to save it. I wanted a drink from my spring. More than anything on earth I wanted to lie flat and drink till I was full of clear, cold, pure spring water; to drink for days. As thirsty as I had been for liquor, I was still more thirsty now for my spring. I must go at once. I thought of the two days' walk; no, I was not up to it, and

besides, some one might get my ranch; I knew Bullpit was watching it. No doubt he had a man ready to do the jumping. The thought of Bullpit aroused me to words.

"Bullpit about?" I asked Van Vader.

"Left this mornin', 'bout two a. m., he and another party and a pack mule—two hours on the road now."

I sprang up. "Who was the other man?"

"A newcomer in these parts; dark, with waxy skin and yellow in the whites of his eyes."

"For God's sake, Van, let me have Sol. I'll get him back to you if I have to bring him in and walk back to Happy Valley. Lend me old Sol!"

He gestured toward the front of the hotel. "He's waitin'. I 'lowed you'd be wantin' to get back to the ranch."

"Van Vader, how can I ever—" I couldn't finish it; I held out my hand.

"He's oily from not bein' rode none. He'll stand some pretty hard ridin'," he said, mildly, and as I went through the lobby like a streak, he sank again into his chair to await later breakfasters.

I mounted Sol and went out of the sleeping town on the run. Bullpit and his man were after my claim. I knew it as well as if I had been told it in so many words. It would mean a worth-while

piece of money to Bullpit to put a man on my watered land with forty acres cleared. They were after my spring, my butte, my high, level plateau that looked on to the vast valley from where pictures came and faded, came and faded. They were after my day from school, my long day of hooky from the big world-school of care and fever and worry. I rode madly, pushing poor Sol, who was not so "oily" as he might have been, to his utmost. After some hours of this, I realized that I could not afford to kill my horse. He and he only could get me there. I slowed down. And then I fell back on the comforting fact that I had a gun. I was in a mood to kill. I felt murder, a desire to murder, rise up in my throat like a gorge, choking me. I wanted to kill Bullpit in cold blood, kill him with my own hands. I examined the gun; it was loaded. I spurred poor Sol and rode on faster. I must get him. I would throw the man off my ranch. I would not give it up—my ranch—my spring—my butte—and then I felt weak and sick and the cold sweat broke out all over me. I knew I hadn't the energy to run a dog off my ranch.

I made a detour through Happy Valley by the rim rock avoiding Tenttown. Poor old Sol was equal only to a walk now, and he could make as good time through the sagebrush as by the road.

At sunset I reached my butte. From the extreme right I carefully picked my way along its length. I was feverish and dizzy. I had just one idea, to reach my spring, then my gun. A long deep drink from the spring and I knew I should be strong, strong enough to shoot. I rode around the nose of the butte, and stopped abruptly. Beside the spring was a tent, newly staked, and back of it hung a clothesline from which depended a man's washing — overalls and shirts.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LITTLE HIRED GIRL

I TURNED quickly back to the right of the butte for I did not want to be seen. I was weak and trembling. My strength had endured only for the ride. I knew if I could reach the spring back of the tent and get a good drink my hands would become steady, steady enough to shoot. The first thing was to reach the spring. The claim jumper might not recognize me. He might mistake me for some thirsty traveler.

I sprang to the ground, dropped Sol's bridle over his head, then walked around the nose of the butte and approached the spring from the rear of the tent. I lay down and drank long, deep, satisfying draughts. I rested some moments, lifting my hand now and then to test its steadiness. At length I felt equal to the undertaking. My hand was steady, my feverishness gone. I was cool and sure of myself—and sure of my purpose. I would go to the tent and order the claim jumper off the ranch. If he resisted I would shoot him down like a dog.

I walked quickly to the tent, and seizing the flap, drew it back. Just within, holding a rifle to her

shoulder, sat Susie. We faced each other's guns.

"Susie!" I cried, dropping mine.

"Billy!" she sobbed out, and throwing down her rifle, burst into crying. I took her in my arms as I might have Ennis had she been that kind of a sister. She clung to me and sobbed frantically. Her tears wet my dusty shirt front, they wet my skin. At last she stopped crying and feeling in all her pockets for a handkerchief — I gave her mine — she mopped her face, then laughed.

"Oh, but I'm glad you've come!"

"But what does it mean? Tell me what you have done," I demanded.

"Well, when you didn't come yesterday, and it was so near the first, I got scared about your ranch; so this morning I got pa to help me take down my tent and we brought it over and set it up — the bed and stove and everything — and I put out a washing to make it look like real homesteading, then I went home. After lunch, we saw Bullpit go past Tenttown with another man and a pack horse, and they didn't stop to see us, so I knew they were up to something.

"I told pa I would go shoot some rabbits for chicken feed. I set off on Baldy, and when I got here they were examining the spring, and when I dismounted and started into the tent, the strange

man spoke so—so horrid that I was frightened. I went right in though, and Bullpit came and said this was all nonsense, that I was not of your family and was just wasting my time—that I couldn't hold your ranch in your absence—and—and—then I said—I—I worked for you, that I was your—hired girl. And he laughed and threw back his head and laughed some more; and the man said, 'Pretty little hired girl, won't you work for me? Won't you get us some dinner?' And of course I didn't have anything here to cook and they knew it—it was a catch—and I said I had been washing and was tired, and they'd better go on to Mr. Bullpit's ranch as maybe he had some food there though he'd been away a good many days.

"Well, they left, but by and by the man came back alone; and he came blustering up to the tent, and he said, 'See here, little girl, you don't want to go mixing in this trouble, and there may be trouble. You'd better saddle up and ride along home.' And I was so mad, I flew about as quick as a flash and grabbed my gun before I thought—for I had brought it just to fool pa, and I said, 'If you're so afraid of trouble, you'd better run along yourself; we're not afraid of it, we pioneers.' And he got white and mad, but he went, and I've been sitting here ever since—and—and when I heard you in

the brush I thought it was the man—and when you went to the spring I was sure of it—and when you drew back the flap—I—oh, what if I had shot!”

Some way I couldn't say a word. I could only mechanically pat her cheek, and stroke her fair hair, for inside of me a perfect torrent was raging. A girl had done this thing for me—me—and what did I deserve at the hands of any girl!

We both heard steps at the same moment, I think, for we both jumped guiltily, and Susie went to the stove and began to pile in sage at an alarming rate. I remained where I was. A big, heavy, hairy hand pulled back the tent flap and a man stood there, a white, waxy-skinned man with bluish lips, big, even teeth, and a thin black mustache.

“Well?” I said, and my hand went to my hip. He smiled sneeringly.

I stepped nearer him. “Susie, my—my hired girl, has told me of your visit. It is rather irregular down here. We are peace-loving people. I think you will like the climate better farther south, and possibly there are other springs. I think,” I repeated, and pulled my gun on him, “you will like the climate farther south!”

I was perfectly steady now and strong. I looked steadily into his evil, black eyes, and noted that the whites had a yellowish hue. Everything about him

was waxen and yellowish. His eyes fell before mine, he turned a shade paler, and backed away under my gun to where his horse stood grazing. When he had mounted and spurred his horse, I returned to the tent.

"Now, Susie," I said, assuming command, "you had better ride home right away. And what I think of all this—what I think of you—what all this means to me—Susie, some day I may be able to tell you. But if you had just pulled a man bodily out of a boggy marsh, and helped him plant his feet once more on solid earth, you wouldn't have come any nearer saving a life than you have—today."

"Why, Billy, I only saved your ranch!" she came back blithely, her attack of nerves completely gone. She began to pin on her hat. The little blue bows above her ears were so very pale now—and I had not so much as brought her a ribbon from town! Oh, I was in the depths—and I was in the clouds!

She rode off, singing an air I had heard many times from the one unscratched record in Happy Valley:

*Some one to love and cheer you,
Sometimes when things go wrong;
Some one to snuggle near you,
Some one to share your song.*

.
Just some one.

CHAPTER X

GOOD NEWS!

WHEN I heard that Bullpit was to teach the school, naturally I was not surprised. Neither was I surprised to learn shortly after that the story of my spree had gone the rounds of our settlement. I knew that it must, and I nerved myself to face it. I dreaded it, and yet a strange peace had fallen upon me. I was back on my ranch—I had my spring. And Mother Lattig, with much volubility, many tears and deep convulsive laughter over the story of Susie's stand against the claim jumper, had boxed my ears because I had not let her know that I was broke, and told me to take the lean-to and welcome. Ed helped me with a team and I soon had a cabin on my ranch that met Uncle Sam's requirements. Susie's tent went back home and in a few days everything was once more moving along regularly. It was this sense of relief, this tremendous let down which resulted from a feeling of security about my ranch that took the edge off the other evil, the knowledge that they must all know. I remained away from Tenttown, and spent my time

helping Mother Lattig with her plowing. She rented a team from Mr. Clark, and we plowed steadily for a week, and I was happy—almost. I even wished the blow would fall and I could have it over. When it did fall it was in a most unexpected manner.

Clark and Bullpit were in the schoolhouse taking a last look at the desks and benches. Our old man wanted to make sure there were enough low ones for the little tots, and, in case there were any too small for even the smaller benches, he was making a few footstools. He had insisted on the windows being set low so the littlest pupil could see out.

"These houses," he had said when we were building the cabin, "where the windows are high don't take no count o' the children. I won't build a house that I can't put the windows down low. Ever see a little shaver with his fingers clingin' to the sill, tryin' to strain his little self up so he can see out? See that once and you won't never build windows high, not for nobody!"

He had a great heart for the children, had our old man—or better, a great heart for humanity. Well, on this day he and Bullpit were looking the place over, and he was finishing up his little footstools. I had gone into the other cabin for some

tool I needed. The thin boards afforded no privacy for conversation.

"I'm sorry about the way I got this school," Bullpit said in his quick, snappy voice. "I like a good fight. I'd rather have seen Brent jump in and make it hard for me to win."

"So—so," our old man said, hammering in a nail.

"Yes. It's a shame he can't keep from drinking; a fine fellow but for drink."

"So—so." Another nail went in sharply.

"Yes, didn't you hear about it? You see, he got in with Crimp, editor of the *Herald*, and from all accounts it was a pair of 'em. A shame about Brent. Didn't come near the examinations."

More nails, sharply, quickly.

"He certainly did cut some ice while in Two Forks," went on Bullpit. "Pawned his watch to a bartender for a gun and some cash—drank up the cash—"

"But kept the gun, I hear." Quick, sharp, the nails went in. "Mighty high-class boy, Billy; drinks high class, same's everything else—with high-class folks; Crimp was a judge once; mighty high-class man." Bang, bang, bang, the little stools were catching it.

I went away without the thing I had wanted.

I climbed to the top of my butte and looked across our great ocean of a valley with its glimmering white specks of tents and its tiny patches of green, and I swore by all that was holy, by all that I loved—and all at once I changed it and swore by the great wide valley with its white old man and his white, white daughter—that never again, so help me, should a drop of liquor pass my lips. I came down feeling strengthened, and returned to Mother Lattig's plowing.

The problem of a school was settled, but the financial problem was still with Tenttown and growing more knotty every day. It involved other tenting homesteaders as well, who had not rightly figured on the cost of getting started on new land, and who had experienced unforeseen accidents and delays in putting in a garden. The homesteading law would permit the men to leave home to find work, but to hold down their claims the women must remain upon them. No one had wintered in the valley, no one could say whether or not the women would be safe and comfortable in tents. To find work, the men would be compelled to go over two hundred miles to a railroad, entirely out of reach of their families. How would the women get supplies? What would they do in case of illness? Ed's wife was expecting another addition

to her family, and he was unwilling to leave her — she must go along. Ed was really of less value on the ranch than either Mr. Clark or Jim, being a machinist by taste as well as trade. He had been held to ranching so far more by the enthusiasm of the old man than by an innate love of the soil.

Whenever the discussion came up, Ed insisted that he was the logical one to go to town to find work, and as regularly the old man objected, urging that they all wait a little longer. He seemed bent on holding Ed to ranching. Jim took to it like a true German. Going to town, a privilege to Ed, would be a punishment to Jim. The old man had no worries on his account. I think the base of the whole matter lay in the fact that he had brought the old lady in on the promise that she would not again be separated from her children. Her children were her very life; she counted nothing a hardship but the thought of separation from one of them. If Ed should go to town, his wife would go and they would lose their claim. They would probably not come back. The old lady might never again have this daughter with her. Our old man was set on the one idea, that his family should stay together.

Then came the great news. We had a system of signals in our valley that I have neglected to mention. If one were in danger or needed help, a red

flag would be run up; if good news came affecting the whole valley, or mail, a white flag. One afternoon late in September I saw a white flag wave bravely from the Clark compound. I set out at once for Tenttown, only stopping on the way to tell Mother Lattig about it. She had seen the flag and was already wildly excited, pacing back and forth and uttering maledictions against herself in several languages for having sold all her horses. She wanted to go; she pushed me frantically away, hanging on to my coat at the same time, beseeching me to hurry back, as it might be news from her son or a letter from her daughter, whose husband ran a small East-side restaurant in New York, and who had promised to come West.

I found our old man in an equal state of excitement, while Mother Clark's eyes were lighted up with hope. The younger women were in gay spirits, and their husbands looked as if a will had just been read, in which they were handsomely remembered. Susie was perched on a barrel end with a great mail-order catalog on her knee and a pencil in her hand. Her fair, white brow was screwed into a frown, for she was engaged in that most fascinating occupation to women homesteaders, catalog shopping. By the hour she and Leeda "shopped" in this fashion. As I joined her she smiled gaily, and declared that she

was really going to send off an order this time. She kicked her pretty feet happily against the barrel, and bent again to her delightful task.

Other neighbors had gathered in, old What's-in-it-for-me gloomier than ever and working his jaw hard, the Book-farmer studiously serious, and several newcomers who had located east of the Clarks, silently curious. One was a powerful giant of a man, a Dane who might have stepped off a Viking's ship. Others were foreigners less unusual in appearance.

Clark held back his big news till all had arrived. Then he waved overhead a sheet of paper, and every one gave attention; even old What's-in-it-for-me stopped his chewing.

"It's work," he choked out, his voice breaking with exultation. "Work for every man jack of us, and right here at home, or next thing to it." Then he explained: John Regan, the stockman who had put the Lattig-mother responsibility on me, was to begin at once digging a canal through the Q Ranch to drain the tule swamps and irrigate the arid acres. He would need wood to operate the dredger, thousands of cords. Work would last four years, possibly longer. Clark was authorized to act as foreman, and organize a wood-cutting crew. Regan would pay five dollars a cord.

When he finished telling about it, stammering over his words in his excitement, he tossed his old rag of a cap in the air and shouted, "Three cheers for Uncle John," and we all took it up, the Dutch-



Sol Sneed

man, the Dane, the Swedes, the Bostonian, the Philadelphian, the Westerners—and the women more lustily than the men. Everyone was grinning, everyone save old Sol Sneed, who, gloomier than ever, resumed his chewing, and the Book-farmer, who seemed searching his mind for a precedent for this peculiar manner of employing labor. One man I noticed in the outskirts of the group whom I was sorry to see there, the waxen-faced claim jumper who had gone farther south to look for land.

Sol Sneed grumbled to Clark as he started toward his horse, "I can't see what's in it for me; I can't leave my store, I can't go to work at my age."

"Why, man alive, there's everything in it for you," cried our ecstatic old man, too happy to be irritated. "Won't you sell more supplies? Won't

there be money in the country? Won't all the settlers be prosperous? Diggin' a ditch twenty-five miles long to reclaim one hundred and fifty thousand acres of land—won't that bring in more settlers? Do you think Uncle John's diggin' this here ditch of his just because water'll look pretty in the desert? Don't you see that one hundred and fifty thousand acres of drained tule swamp and irrigated sagebrush will mean a thousand or more settlers with money to buy this land? And it all a layin' just over Wind Mountain there, not fifteen miles from the heart of our valley. Oh, man, but I knowed it. I knowed all along that somethin like this was just bound to happen to a big, new, raw country that nobody hadn't never touched yet, and Uncle John's a doin' it. Oh, but the fine sunrises we'll see over our valley wavin' in wheat. Oh, but things is happenin' quick, mighty quick!"

Sol Sneed rode away, still working his lantern jaw. He couldn't see anything in it for him.

I think I was the first to sign up with our old man. "I don't know what I can do," I said, "but I'm in for it."

"The wood choppin' will be in your line, Billy," he said, in a mild, half-apologetic way. "It smells right sweet, cuttin' juniper up in the hills. It smells right sweet, and the juniper is fair easy. You just

cut along with Ed and Jim and me. Our teams will do the haulin' and you cut."

A day or so later our old man rode over to see me. He was leading a horse. He had stopped to take a look at the school, for it had been running a week now, with Susie, three of her nephews, four Dutchies, two Danes, and a Swede composing the student body. He came on to my ranch where I was busy grubbing, and pausing, looked back toward the little schoolhouse.

"We'll have a bell," he said. "One you can hear ten miles away. Won't that be some sound to hear a school bell peal right out in Happy Valley?" His eyes gleamed.

No wonder our old man was not rich. His vision had never included stacking up gold. I am sorry to admit that I was not jubilant over the development of the valley. It was coming, but—well, I loved our isolation, our out-of-touchness with civilized life. However, I said nothing, and he went on talking, throwing one leg over the saddle horn and hunching to one side in the plainsman's resting habit when mounted. "We're all goin' to be in funds now, and work will bring in other settlers; pretty quick—you see, I've pioneered Texas and Oklahoma—there won't be any vacant land left in Happy Valley. We're all entitled to a

desert claim apiece. I think it'd be a right good idea for all of us to make a desert filin' before we get so busy choppin' wood we won't have time to look up the land or go to Two Forks to file."

"I really don't believe I can handle more than I've got, Mr. Clark," I said. "I would like to improve my place, fence it and get in a crop. I don't believe I ought to tackle a desert claim."

"Billy, the land will be worth a good many crops; better come along with me and look it over."

The result was that I filed on three hundred and twenty acres that lay a good fifteen miles farther south, the old man putting up the filing fee, the same to be returned to him out of my first wages as a wood chopper. I hadn't wanted any more land, and I had a feeling that I was being managed, being got into it, on some idea of his that it was good for me to have all the responsibility I could stagger under. After I had filed, I was glad he had compelled me to do so. I certainly did have a feeling of greater interest in the valley. It gives a man a queer, new, self-important sensation, this matter of acquiring land. It grows on him and he wants to get more and more. Clark and each of his sons-in-law filed on desert claims, the old man urging the boys on with, "It won't never be no cheaper." It would keep us strapped to prove up on these claims,

for wells must be dug and the land watered. Did our old man think it was good for all of us to be pretty well strapped down to the country? What-
ever he thought, he had his way with us.

CHAPTER XI

BAD NEWS

WE established camp in the juniper woods, the dwarfed, scraggy timber of the lower mountain sides, twenty miles from Tenttown. Ed was cook for our division. Every man in Happy Valley save the Dutchman, the Book-farmer and Sol Sneed was in camp. I made poor time at the beginning and would have given up just because I couldn't see myself making wages, but our old man was patient and kept me at it.

All day he whistled or sang, and all day he kept us steadily chopping. The regular swing of the ax, the rhythm of it after I got the hang of the thing, and my muscles got over being sore, was exhilarating. These healthy-minded, eager men, happy through and through over a "job," a chance to stay on their ranches and make them profitable, were inspiring companions. And really this was the only apparently insurmountable obstacle to homesteading. You could not get your living out of the soil short of a year, and if you had no money to feed your body-engine while getting your ranch under

cultivation, how could you run the engine? As our old man said, it was the string that was just too short to reach around the package. It couldn't be stretched, it had to be spliced, and Uncle John, as he persisted in calling Mr. Regan, had come along just in time to do the splicing.

"Oh, but I knowed it!" he would say over and over again. "You can't never see all the way but with the eyes of faith. I knowed it all along."

The real genius of our wood-chopping brigade was the big Dane. He never wasted a breath on anything but work. He was up with the first "sun-risers" and his ax was the last to break the stillness at night. I looked on his pile of wood and marvelled. To have an arm like that, muscles of marble and tendons of steel! His body was a perfectly constructed machine governed by a mind with just one idea—to cut wood. A blow would carry a small tree half off its stump; another completed the felling. Often I had to pause and watch his perfect work, losing strokes myself, but I would more than make up later trying to make his time. He was a prince of wood choppers, a very king among us.

Only once during the first month did I see him pause, save for food and sleep. The Book-farmer rode up to our camp evidently on an important errand. Every one stopped chopping to greet him,

every one, that is, save the great Dane. The Book-farmer greeted us but rode on over to where the blond giant's ax was in the air on its descending stroke.

"Your wife has twin girls!" the Book-farmer informed him.

The ax paused on its downward stroke. "The hell!" Then the ax came on down. Chop, chop, chop, not another tremor of disturbance, not a lost stroke.

The Book-farmer came back to the rest of us, irritated over his reception by the Dane. We asked for news of the settlement. Every one was well, it seemed. The school—he believed there was a little trouble over discipline at the school. He had heard the children talking some, and two of the Dane's girls had passed his place crying. They couldn't understand English, so he could not make out the trouble. They had cried harder with each question he put to them, so he had let them go along, but he believed the teacher had whipped the smaller one. Susie was staying with Mother Lattig; he had not seen Susie; he did not know her version of the affair. One of the Dutchman's children had been whipped, too—one of the smallest ones. Maybe they needed it; still, in Boston corporal punishment—

And here Ed broke in about his wife. The youngest child had had a cold when he left. Was he well now? And this reminded the Bostonian of another thrilling episode.

"The cattle are coming down from the hills in large bunches," he said. "It seems that among them there are bulls. Your dog Jake chased a big black bull into your tent—"

"God! man—was my wife—"

The Bostonian regarded the interrupter impersonally. "The dog Jake, as I was about to say, bayed the bull till he had backed into your tent. I should not say precisely into it, but his hind legs were well in. Your wife was within, with both children. The bull was at the front of the tent, next the opening. She could not risk going out, in the face of a mad, bayed bull, and she dared not stay in, for any moment a more desperate plunge, a further weakening of the tent, and he would roll bodily into it, and she would be at the animal's mercy; so—"

"Great heavens, man, is she all right? What happened?"

The Bostonian looked at Ed coldly.

"As I was saying," he continued with extreme patience, "she dared not go out and she dared not stay in, and the silly beast continued to bay and the

silly bull to snort and bellow and plunge about. He was a monster in size, and indeed, a very ugly brute. So with rare coolness, I should say, she pushed the babies under the bed, rolled some boxes against the bed to keep them there, then got her twenty-two, and pulling the tent up, so she could get her aim true, shot — ”

“The bull?”

“No, the dog. It stopped his baying and the bull got himself loose. Susie, who had been looking on and who had snapped a picture of the encounter, chased the animal off. She was under the impression that your wife had gone to Jim’s tent. She had not realized there was any cause for alarm.”

“Did you see my babies? Are you sure Lil is all right?”

“Oh, perfectly. She pulled the babies out from under the bed, when they set up a yell over being taken away from a bag of prunes which they had found. I assure you they are perfectly all right.”

He rode away, precisely, unsmiling, as he had come. Our old man laughed heartily as did the rest of us, all but the Dane, who was not losing a stroke, and Ed, who sat on a fallen juniper tree, his shoulder drooped, his hands hanging down over his legs,

his mouth down at the corners. When our old man saw the boy, he stopped laughing.

"Now, Ed, Lil's all right. Don't you go gettin' down in the mouth. Nothin' will happen to Lil. Why, I trained that girl like a man. She's strong, Lil is, and she's resourceful; showed awful good sense shootin' the dog. Couldn't have killed the bull without a straight bead between his eyes. If she had wounded him, he'd a been more fightin' mad and the fool dog would a kept on bayin'; mighty good sense, killin' the dog."

"It's no way to treat women, leaving them to wild cattle. It's no way to do." Ed was plainly in the dumps.

"Now see here, Ed, it's pioneerin' right, that's all. If you don't want no experience, why, don't pioneer. There's thousands o' folks just feedin' their faces and keepin' alive, with nothin' interestin' a-happenin' to 'em. If you want that kind of a life, there's plenty of it. It's this that's scarce—an' fine!"

Ed got up, viciously seized his ax, and went to work. I was sorry for Ed, and I didn't blame him for being worried. We had no idea of breaking camp until the snow should drive us out of the mountains. The plan was to get money enough ahead to return to our ranches in time to put in

spring crops. Then with the fall, back again to the woods.

I fell to wondering about Susie. If Bullpit were having trouble with his discipline there must be exciting events in the little schoolhouse. Susie and Leeda were the only pupils of any size. I could see them sitting together on a long bench, Susie fresh and crisp in a white, middy blouse with her little washed-out ribbons tied into perky, if faded, bows, while her eyes, that some way Dame Nature had caught down so fascinatingly at the corners, twinkled with amusement, and beside her the stout, solemn-eyed Leeda in her red cashmere basque. Did Bullpit have trouble with their discipline? I would have given a good deal for a look in at the school.

It was the end of November. Snow flurries for some days had warned us of coming winter. I had looked at the Dane and wondered how he kept his level, steady stroke, for it must be getting cold in the valley, too, and sagebrush fires are tindery things, and a tent didn't seem to me much protection for a young mother. Had he no thought for the woman who was down in the valley alone with his babies? Or did his steadiness show a better protectiveness than Ed's flighty and moody turns; for Ed had not got over his protest. He was evidently sick of pioneering. The food was tiresome;

the work uncongenial. The whole thing was getting on his nerves—Ed, who had always been a machinist on good pay.

Was the Dane, who chopped like a perfect machine, doing better by his family than the man who fretted and stewed and diminished his earning power? Ed was the cook of our camp, and cooking, too, seemed to add to his growing discontent. We had no variety—bacon, potatoes, camp bread, prunes, coffee. No butter, no milk, no eggs—our three meals were almost identical.

The old man said to me one evening, "I think it might not be a bad idea for you to ride down into the valley tomorrow, and see if everything is all right; also stay a night on your ranch. You ain't got anybody holdin' it down for you—you're the only bachelor; maybe you'd better go sleep a night on your ranch. The little government agents, they come peekin' around some times, and mebbly you'd better ride down."

I jumped at the chance. Goodness knows, I wanted to go—but I thought of poor homesick Ed. "Hadn't Ed better go?" I suggested.

"N-no, Ed ain't in no condition right now to get loose in the valley with money in his pocket. Ed would be for beatin' it to town, and Lil's some foolish over Ed. She'd go if he said the word."

I was surprised at one feature of this; our old man had given me to understand that he was holding the money due us all for our chopping. Was he then holding only mine? Was I still the one not to be trusted with cash and a horse? I felt suddenly sick at heart; in these months of hard work I had come to feel the equal of these men. The old man saw his mistake at once. "Ed'd maybe'll have to go to town for supplies; you see I'd have to let him have his money, and when he had money and a team—why, he'd go. Yes, Ed'd go. You'd better ride down in the mornin'."

It helped, but still I knew the old man didn't fully trust me. However, I was glad of a chance to get away. A better mood came as I wound down into Happy Valley. The number of tents had increased. I counted at least five new ones, scattered between Tenttown and my ranch. Had Bull-pit been the locator? I rode on, wholly at ease, the nippy air tingling my blood, and sending it bounding through my body.

I stopped at my cabin, and looked over the plateau, and my heart warmed to it afresh. I would build a stone house, as soon as the wood chopping ended, for the old man figured we would have a month or six weeks of holiday in midwinter. I would build a stone house and buy a good cook stove, and put

up cupboards and shelves, and make a real home of it.

I stood in my door looking over the valley while plans thronged through my head. I would send for rabbit wire at once. That, and my house and a well on my desert claim would take every cent I would make by chopping wood this winter. But the coming summer I could put in a crop; then in the fall more wood chopping. The prospect looked delightful to me—and just over the way was the little schoolhouse and Susie.

I closed the cabin door and galloped away singing as I went. As I approached the schoolhouse it occurred to me to slip up and take a look at Bullpit teaching his school, at Susie and Leeda back of their books, and also surprise Mother Lattig. So I stopped some distance away, dropped the bridle over my horse's head, and crept up past the windowless side of the house. I paused to listen. An altercation was going on,—I went on to where I could see into one of the windows. They would all have seen me but that their gaze was centered on an affair of vast moment inside.

As I drew near I saw Bullpit spring up from his seat back of the desk and with a flash of temper, unhook and jerk from around his body a leather belt.

"I think we'll make you understand this much Engleesh, anyway," he snapped out, and the younger Danish girl began to whimper. He had imitated the child's way of speaking "English" in an ugly, sneering manner. He came down the short aisle and raised the belt. In a flash, Susie who was sitting at the back of the room beside the scared and stolid Leeda, sprang to her feet.

"If you're going to whip anyone else, you'd better take someone your size," she threw at him, her eyes lowering and her breath coming short. "This is the third time you've pounced on poor little Tita because she can't understand English. You're—a —a brute!"

"Then, my dear young woman, I might begin on you." He spoke playfully, but his nostrils quivered. His temper had got the better of him.

"Try it," dared Susie, advancing in the aisle, and turning her strong young shoulders for his lash. He lifted the belt, and brought it down—once. I sprang through the window but before I could reach him Susie had whirled about, seized his two thin shoulders, and thrown him backward to the floor, going down with him, and raining blows on his face. I snatched her away, and getting the wretched little coward by the collar, dragged him, choking, kicking and tearing, to the door, pushed

him down the steps and flung him out into the sagebrush. Bullpit's habitual defence, his gun, was lacking on this day. He was brave only when armed. I must confess that it was not especially to my credit that I was able quickly to reduce him to a state of non-resistance—he had neither muscle nor science; and also I must confess to an unholy joy in the enterprize. Whatever the thrashing was to do for Bullpit, it did me an immense amount of good.

Leaving him limp in the dirt, I turned back to the school house. The children, frightened into silence, were bunched in the doorway. Only Leeda could speak—she had been gazing with housewifely disapproval on some red spots on the floor. Bullpit's nose had bled profusely: "Oh, Susie, see what you went and done!" she exclaimed.

Susie would not see. Her head was in the air and her eyes were snapping fire. At my suggestion the children gathered up their books and lunch pails and set out for home. Susie was the last to come out, following along after Leeda.

"Oh, Susie, you hadn't oughta started it!" remonstrated her solemn friend.

"Shut up! Don't I know it without you telling me? Spoiling pa—pa's school—and him—away!"

I joined the two girls. "Don't you care, Susie, the term is nearly over."

"He's a—a beast!" she screamed, her anger again rising. She was so worked up that my sudden appearance and part in the disturbance had not called for comment. "He's been mean to those little Danish girls, tormenting them because they can't understand English, all along. He only stopped because Mother Lattig took them to live with her to save them the long walk, and for company, and he's afraid of big Mother Lattig. He was so mean to Leeda's little sisters that their mother took them out. He always picks on the little ones, and the foreign ones who can't understand. And he was mean to you, Leeda; you know very well he was the meanest of all to you. He tried it on me, too, at first!"

"Tried what?" I suddenly felt hot under my collar. "What did he try, Susie?" I demanded, sharply.

"Oh, nothing." Her face was red and she looked away. Leeda blushed. A younger girl following along behind piped up, "He was sweet on Susie, that's what he was; he was sweet on Susie and when he showed her how to hold her pen, he put his arm around her; he was sweet on Susie, he was sweet on Susie!"

"Shut up, you little brat!" screamed the exasperated Susie. The child stopped for a moment, then ran on ahead with the other little children, sing-songing, "He was sweet on Susie, and Susie set on him; he was sweet—"

"Leeda, can't you stop that kid?" Susie demanded, her face very red.

"Well, you know, Susie, it's the truth!" blurted out the solemn Leeda.

I hurried ahead to the little Dutch girl. "See here," I said, "didn't Susie protect you all from a whipping? Now if you want her to look out for you in the future, you'd better shut right up!" The child collapsed, and I went back to the two girls.

"And Pa was so proud of his school," moaned Susie. Then, in a flash, "I don't care, I hate him!"

Her loyalty to her father was having a hard struggle with her rage against Bullpit, which had evidently smouldered for many weeks. Also, I found that she and Leeda had said nothing to their respective mothers about school troubles, not wanting to worry them, and hoping things would straighten out by the time the men returned. Ed had been right. Pioneering was not fair to the women.

After getting Susie restored to a degree of her usual calm, I turned back. Bullpit must leave our

valley. I would tell him so in no uncertain terms. He had laid his soiled hands on these two young girls—and he would have to go.

When I reached the schoolhouse he was nowhere to be seen. I hunted up Mother Lattig; she had been clearing sage brush at the farther extremity of her ranch and had missed the excitement. For this she blamed me in a volley of vituperation; she had no love for the Ratter. "Ah, Billy," she said, "I so mad at heem—skunk—I tink I bite off hees ear myself! You kill heem? No? Too bad!" To answer all her questions and pacify her for having missed seeing the thrashing consumed considerable time. When I finally reached Bullpit's tent, he was not there.

He did not show up the following morning. I rode down the valley to see the rest of the settlers.

One real calamity had befallen the women which they had taken care to conceal from the men, not wanting to worry them. A heavy frost which had come immediately following our departure for the juniper woods had caught the root crops. In their haste to begin chopping wood the men had had no time to put the roots away in pits. The task had been left for the women. The frost would have come just the same, had the men been there, for this being our first year in the valley, no one knew when

to expect frost and no one was prepared. Still the women felt responsible. It was a real calamity. The potatoes, onions, beets, carrots and parsnips which otherwise would have formed the chief diet all winter had had to be supplanted by the monotonous fare of boiled beans. While Mrs. Clark was telling me about it a flock of wild geese flew overhead, honking their way south.

"And we don't dare shoot one," she said, looking up. She shook her head, lamenting. "Now and then this winter, Billy, I've been a real law breaker in my heart. I've been willin' to shoot them for some fresh meat for Lil. It's been hard for Lil —"

"Why didn't you?" I demanded. It seemed to me the maddest thing in the world that these pioneers could not use all that the country had to offer in their fight for a home. The geese and ducks passed overhead in thousands, only to be shot in another state where the game laws did not protect them.

"It was Susie, I guess. Susie's our best shot, but she can't bear to kill anything. She can't do it. They haunt her, nights, she says. We got up a jackrabbit drive once, and when we got them all cornered, Susie cried so we had to let 'em go. They do whine and look up at you like babies. She can't even kill a chicken."

I looked about—where were the chickens? Mother Clark had had a dozen thrifty laying hens in the fall.

“I cooked ’em,” she explained, “for Lil. She’s pullin’ through right well, considerin’.”

The idea I had had in the East that jack rabbits could be made to supply the meat item of a homesteader’s diet was erroneous. The rabbits were not healthy—they were “grubby”—and no rancher ate them. Sometimes a newcomer tried it, but never more than once.

The Dane had given me no commission, but I rode over to his ranch just the same. Its isolation, and the women having no teams, had left the Danish family to themselves. I had found the two little girls, who had taken Susie’s place at Mother Lattig’s to save them the long walk, excessively white and thin, and I wondered how his wife was faring. Since the advent of the twins, when Mother Lattig had been with her, no one had seen the Dane’s wife. Rheumatism was keeping Mother Lattig a prisoner on her ranch.

I stopped at the Dane’s tent and called, but there was no answer. I sprang down and called again. I heard a faint moan, and pushing back the tent flap, went in. There lay the woman, emaciated to skin and bones, and beside her on the dirty bed the

babies pulled at her flabby breasts. I spoke, but her eyes opened only to add terror to her weakness. She could understand no English. I could get no response but a succession of weak moans. Her lips were blue and her cheeks sunken under high, prominent bones. I never saw anything so ghastly, alive. I made a quick survey of the tent and found no food save half a sack of potatoes and some salt. The answer was plain. The woman was starving.

I galloped to Mother Lattig's. With tears streaming down her cheeks and amidst a volley of prayers, gutturally intermingled with curses, she put up a pail of soup, while I hitched my horse to the buckboard.

The woman took the soup, at first fearfully, and after a few spoonfuls, eagerly. Then I lifted her into the buckboard and carted her over to Mother Lattig's. The schoolhouse was turned into a hospital, and Susie came over to help.

The Book-farmer set off to the Q Ranch to 'phone for a doctor, and I started to the hills for the Dane. It was dark when I reached camp and everyone had knocked off work. They came to meet me, all but the Dane, and I told them all that had happened. They drew back in heavy silence while I went on over to break the news to the Dane, sitting alone by

his solitary camp fire. He looked up, frowning, as I accosted him.

"Your wife is very ill. You must go home at once," I said. His face did not indicate that he comprehended. I added, "She is dying. Hurry!"

Over his great, broad, impassive face there swept a charge of fury.

"Go home," I said, shouting as to a deaf man. "Your wife is dying!"

"My wife," he roared, "she go die! And I vork like hell. God damn!"

I went back to the settlement with the Dane the next morning, for my responsibility toward Mother Lattig was still with me, and besides I had not slept a night on my ranch. Our old man suggested that I stay in the settlement a while—for I told him of Susie's trouble with Bullpit and hinted at the rascality which I believed lay deeper in his nature. He wasn't willing for Ed to get loose with money, but he was uneasy about the women folks after the poor Danish woman's experience. There might be other outlying homesteaders in trouble. Maybe other men had gone away and left women to depend on roots that had been caught by the frost. He wanted me to make a roundup of the valley and see that everyone was well and had supplies. Of course I was better at this than at chopping wood.

My first visit would be to Bullpit's tent. He must leave Happy Valley. I had nearly one hundred dollars from my wood chopping, and I meant to offer to buy his relinquishment. I didn't know what I could do with it. I wished I might send for Ennis to file on it, but I knew there was nothing in her nature that would respond to pioneering. Still, I would buy him out. I believed Bullpit would accept the money and leave, for the biggest thing about him was his vanity. After the return of the men from the juniper woods, the situation for him would be unbearable.

When I asked our old man for my money, he looked at me questioningly, but I did not explain. He wrote out my check. John Regan had put a sum of money in the bank to his credit with which to pay his men.

However, the check was not needed. Bullpit was gone. His horse, his mule, and all his clothes were gone, leaving only his brown tent. I rode on to Tenttown and learned that he had collected three months' pay from the Book-farmer, who was clerk. The Book-farmer had thought best to pay him in full and have no more trouble, especially as the term was so nearly ended.

I was well satisfied. Bullpit was gone. That was all that I needed to know for my peace of mind.

I had a visit with my little "hired girl," who had got over her remorse, but was not to be teased about whipping her teacher. It was a sore subject with her. I rode on, making the rounds of the homesteads. I had one hundred dollars, I was rid of Bullpit, and the sun still shone over Happy Valley. I fell to planning the investment of my money. I would build the long-planned stone house and I would have Ennis send me a box of personal belongings, books and cushions and pipes and pennants and pictures; and in the box would be blue ribbons for my little hired girl. I smiled over that parcel of blue ribbons; foolishly I wanted to select them myself.

The Dutchman's ranch was coming on wonderfully. He was far and away the most prosperous homesteader we had. He had built a good-sized barn, hauling the lumber over one hundred miles; he had five good, fat teams, in which he had invested twelve hundred dollars, and they must have care. His family still lived in a tent, though he had the lumber on the ground for a house. He showed me his farm machinery. He had put up a machine shed alongside his barn, and had invested two thousand dollars in tools.

"Ven a man vorks all his life, und saves somedings for a farm some day," he explained with

pleased pride, "he wants everyting goot. Mine cash, he most gone, but dere he is," and he pointed to his barn, his horses, and his machinery.

All the little Dutchies were endlessly busy—clearing, plowing, and leveling. He wanted a large part of his nine hundred and sixty acres ready for a gigantic crop of spring wheat. To stop to build a barn had merely been a provision of economy.

I rode away, once more laying out my hundred dollars. Rabbit wire—of course there must be rabbit wire for at least thirty acres; then seed, and my stone house, which would cost only the labor. I wanted a horse, but decided I must wait awhile.

The next day word came of Lil's illness. She had lost her baby, and she wanted Ed. I rode off to the hills at once for him. She was a stout, strong woman, and made a rapid recovery. The nourishment that had not been sufficient for the little new life, had sufficed for her.

It was in January that the stunning blow fell on Happy Valley. The Book-farmer brought us the news: John Regan had been indicted for using juniper wood from the government forest reserve to run the dredger that was digging his ditch through the swamp. Work must close down; the cordwood which we had been all the winter cutting had been confiscated.

CHAPTER XII

BULLPIT'S REVENGE

WE broke camp at once and returned to the valley. Each one took the stopping of work in his own individual way. Ed was for pulling freight at once. This, together with Lil's illness, and the doctor's visit, which had cost him fifty dollars, had finished Ed. He was through with "the dom country." Jim looked to our old man, as he had right along, for guidance. Our old man was a trifle pale under his heavy tan and his big laugh was stilled. He walked about stroking his stubby-bearded chin and saying nothing.

The Dane, whose wife had lived after all, stood about heavily and ominously silent. Sol Sneed, hearing the news, was at Tenttown to meet us on our return. He said he'd known all along there wouldn't be nothin' in it for him; and where was he to get his pay for grub he'd let homesteaders have on tick? "Where do I come in?" he querulously demanded of our old man, who turned away from him and walked around to the back of his

tent. Mother Clark had been crying, I could see by her eyes.

"It—it kinda gets on your nerves, Billy, a tent," she explained apologetically, when I followed her inside after the general meeting of the neighbors. The wood choppers had come for their pay, and to talk things over. "It gets on your nerves, after a while, havin' to roll up your beds every mornin', and move all the dishes off the table when you make bread, or write a letter. And when the wind blows the tent flaps so. It gets on your nerves." Her lips trembled. "I'd planned on a house this spring, somethin' great. In town I had a piano most paid for. I cooked in a loggin' camp to earn the money. Always, I wanted a piano. But I had to let it go back. I kinda hoped maybe—" She wiped her eyes. "You see these children ought to have music, and Susie loves it. I'd made sixteen payments, and I thought maybe—you see they gave me a year to redeem it. I had to let it go back."

"Don't you care, ma," said Susie, stoutly, but batting her eyes hard. "Something else will happen. Pa always finds a way." She ran up the steps. Poor little "hired girl"! The ribbons were quite white, and they didn't stand up so perkily as was their wont.

I turned away. I wished I was a woman and

could cry too. I went outside. Sol Sneed was deviling the Dane about his grocery bill. Ed had gone to his own tent across the way, whistling. I think he was glad of a break-up. The other homesteaders were leaving. From Susie's tent came the sentimental strains of our one unscratched record, "Some one to love you—" It sounded as incongruous as rag time at a funeral. I walked on around the tent. There sat our old man on a soap box. He coughed and hastily used his handkerchief.

"I'm a thinkin' o' Uncle John," he said, gently.

I stopped still. Who else of all our down-hearted crew had thought of 'Uncle John'? I sat down on the ground and waited.

"He's in deep, is Uncle John."

"Do you know him?" I asked, awed by this higher ground of our old man.

"Yes, right well; no, I never set eyes on him, but I know him right well."

"I met him once."

"You did?" He asked me nothing about my impression. I didn't feel called upon to give it.

We all went away to our separate cabins quite as though we had indeed attended a funeral. I sat by my stove, trying to think things out. The men of Tenttown would now be compelled to leave the valley and find work. They were reduced, through the

loss of the root crop, to store food, and store food meant cash. The horses were also a problem, they must be fed. The supply of hay was extremely low.

Our old man came over to me a couple of days later. He stood in my cabin doorway, looking over the wide valley now covered with snow.

"It was Bullpit," he said at last, turning back to me.

"Bullpit!"

"He had a grudge, Bullpit did; he wanted to strike at the settlers—at us; he couldn't find a better way."

"But how—where did he get the power?"

"One of them little government agents was a-nosin' around for somethin' to make a report about. He earns his livin' that way, makin' reports, and Bullpit set him on. He's—he's not dull, Bullpit."

And so this was his pay for the thrashing. We both had the same thought, I think, for the old man said, kindly: "I don't want Susie or the women to get a notion o' this. The child sets a sight o' store by her pa. I wouldn't have Susie get a notion of it. It's did and it can't be undid."

So that was the answer to his haste to get away. I might have known he would do more than merely leave us. And he would come back, undoubtedly.

He would surely add to his revenge that far. Bullpit would be back.

"How is the case going for Mr. Regan? Have you had word?" I knew the old man had been to the Q Ranch.

"He'll fight it. He's in Portland now. That's a man—Uncle John. I—I got Ed a job at the Q Ranch, wranglin' cattle. Ed don't know much about wranglin' cattle, always workin' with machinery, but he'll learn. He's gone." He studied the snow a while longer. "If you had a job—now—"

"Never mind me," I hurried to say. "I can look out for myself; you see to your boys—they have wives and babies to feed; you see to yourself."

"A wife and baby is somethin' to do it for. You ain't got—" He stopped. He didn't finish the sentence. "Ed's got that job at wranglin' and it will keep the groceries goin' a spell. I'll sell a couple of the horses, and that will help some. In the meantime, we all got to conform to Uncle Sam's rule just the same about them desert claims. We got to have a well apiece on them. Before lookin' about for a chance to get out of the country and earn some cash ahead of croppin' time, we'd better make sure of holdin' the desert claims. We'll start a well on yours tomorrow."

"But why mine? Why not yours or Jim's or Ed's? Ed's furnishing the food—or will be soon. Why not Ed's?"

"We'll start with yours," the old man persisted. "We'll pack up Susie's tent and go to your desert claim in the mornin'. Susie can stay with Mother Lattig—Susie or one of the Dane's girls. We'll start diggin', and we'll have it dug in two weeks."

I was irritated. "I can't for the life of me see the sense of starting on mine," I exclaimed. "Usually I can see at least a grain of sense in your philanthropies, but not in this."

"We'll be startin' right early," he answered, gently. "I'll get up here with the horses and a pack right early."

CHAPTER XIII

THE WELL

MY desert claim lay fifteen miles south of my homestead, a shut-in pocket in the hills, secluded and unwatered. I had a vague plan to make it into a cattle ranch. I could see in imagination thousands of head of cattle on the surrounding hills, and the level stretch one unbroken field of grain.

As we turned out of Happy Valley between the hills into my own little pocket, my heart swelled with the pride of possession. I felt rise up within me a mighty will to hold this land, to make it my own and materialize my vision.

"A mighty purty piece," our old man said, pulling up his horse. His eyes brightened with that look that I have come to know belongs to the seer and to the prophet—also to the true pioneer.

"Make a great little cattle ranch some day," I added. We both sat silent, gazing across the still, untouched corner of earth, virgin, and breathing the charm and the promise of all virginity. Not being watered, it had not been trampled down by cattle.

The sagebrush was so large it almost hid our horses. We crushed along through it, its very odor invigorating. It shouted life from every snapping fibre, youth from every crushed cell. It was the very voice of the virgin soil, calling to men to possess it. There was a singing note in its fragrance, a rousing, stirring influence. I wondered, as we pushed on through the brush, our horses shaking their heads this way and that to avoid the prickling of the harsh branches, I wondered if there really could be some stimulating quality in the sagebrush itself; if even as the poppy held an opiate, this sage held a tonic. It seemed to me that it might be so. I remembered hearing that the finest specimens of Indians came from the sagebrush countries. I thought of Mr. Clark and of the Clark girls, who had grown up in the sagebrush wilds of Texas and Oklahoma, and who were strong and muscular, balanced both in mind and body. And I thought of sturdy, self-reliant Susie, my funny, little "hired girl," and before I knew it I was whistling the one unscratched Tenttown record, "Just some one." Our old man stopped his horse.

"Here'd be a likely place," he said. He had been leading in the ride over the land, and studying it for a well location, while I had been wandering in a world of my own.

We got down and walked about, examining the ground. Clark finally drove in a stake.

"I'd say right here for the first one," he said. "It's the highest point and will make more diggin', but its elevation will put the water easily over the whole ranch, that is, if you get water enough. If not, the next well can be dug lower down. But I'd put the first one up here. No tellin' how long we'll have to dig—or how quick we'll have to stop, for that matter."

That was one disadvantage about a virgin country. There were no precedents, no books in which we could look it up; we had to prove each thing for ourselves. We were true Robinson Crusoes.

He started digging, while I set up the tent, and so high was the sagebrush, and so low the tent, that a few feet away it was lost to view. I hung our bacon, flour, and potatoes in bags to the ridgepole out of the way of thieving coyotes, constructed a camp stove, then melted snow for water, filling several cans.

The work went rapidly, and thanks to my months of grubbing and chopping I had sufficient muscle to keep steadily at it, though I still had to admit that at twenty-two I was not as good a man as our old man at sixty-three. He had spent his years in a steady, cheerful fight with nature, and it had made

him not only strong, but pliable. I imagined he had never failed in a bout with nature; only the wiles of men had been too much for him; but his spirit was sweet, and his hope a living fountain, and the world owed him little, it seemed to me, after all, that it had not paid.

'About nine feet down we came to a gravel stratum that was much more difficult to dig through, owing to its caving proclivities. It lasted some six or seven feet, and then we struck hard pan. This was the first really dirty work I had ever done, and frankly I did not like it, but the old man whistled and sang, and stopped only to wipe the sweat from his forehead, and seemed to be in his native element. I suppressed my sentiments toward this particular phase of pioneering; however, I could not help thinking of the three other wells ahead of us—three more—and the old man could sing!

At eighty feet I was good and sick of the whole proposition. We had been digging two weeks. I didn't believe we would ever reach water. I was for giving the thing up and starting another well lower down. It would be easier to lift the water by machinery, I argued with the old man, than to dig wells so deep. He admitted that often in dry countries you had to go one hundred feet, sometimes more. He had gone two hundred. At that I

struck. We had dug far enough, and it was my well and my land, and I insisted on stopping. The old man slowly scratched his chin in a way he had when he was up against it. We were at the top of the well, ready to begin the day's work.

"You take Baldy, Billy, and ride over to Tenttown and get another rope," he said. "I'll be reachin' up to fill the bucket now by night. And I'd like awful well to know that everything's all right down to Tenttown; I'd like awful well to know, Billy; and we gotta have more rope."

His patience—and I think his diplomacy—won me out of my rebellion. And it was perfectly true, if we were to continue to dig, we would have to have more rope. We had provided just eighty feet.

He lowered himself. I looked over the brim of the long, deep hole in the ground and shuddered at the small insect he was, so far down, digging and whistling. I left him and rode away for the rope. Calmness returned to me on the long gallop, and I figured that we couldn't be so very far from water after all. I would see it out.

All the Clarks ran out to meet me, eager for news. Susie had wanted to come to visit us, but as we had both the horses this had not been possible, unless she walked. There was no news—she said—Oh, yes, there was, Jim's wife reminded her—Bullpit

was back. Neither Susie nor any of the Clark women knew of his connection with the Regan indictment. He had stopped at the tent, saying he wanted to be friends, and Susie, like the good little sport she was, had been willing to forget. I think a man can usually thrash another man and then shake hands with him and feel all right about it. But with most women the enemy is never thrashed. Susie had in this the viewpoint of her brothers of the race. Her rancor seemed to have passed, and she now laughed over the skirmish. This made me a trifle uneasy. I wished she knew the truth about Bullpit, but it would cut her too deeply, and her father had said she must not know, so I withheld what I knew.

"Susie hadn't oughta started it," her mother said to me, with a chiding look at her daughter. "Of course, as he says, no man that is a man can fight back at a woman; he couldn't a done nothin' different; Susie hadn't oughta started it."

I could not wait for much of a visit, for I thought of the old man I had left down in the well. Something might happen to him while I was away.

I succeeded in borrowing twenty feet of rope from the Book-farmer, who had just bought it, and promising that we would both return within a week or ten days at the latest, rode back to the well. Our

old man was hard at it. I called down to him that Mother Clark had sent him a big, fat peach pie. I told him to come up at once, or I'd eat it all. I wanted to take his place, and let him haul up the dirt for a change. He ordered me, with a chuckle, to let that pie alone till supper time, and get busy with the windlass. I put the pie safely under a pan, with some fresh bread, stood a mason jar of stewed peaches on top, and quickly got into my digging clothes.

I wound up the rope on the windlass and fastened the new piece to the end of it. The new rope was stiff and hard and I had considerable difficulty in splicing it. The knot slipped treacherously. For some time I struggled with the knot, but my hands were stiff with cold and unaccustomed to the intricacies of splice knots. Finally I decided to attach the new rope to the windlass, making a loop of it to which I would fasten the old rope. That would do for the present. I succeeded in doing this after several bungling attempts and at length sent the bucket spinning down the shaft for the earth which our old man had loosened while waiting.

"I kinda have a feelin' that we're gettin' somewhere, Billy," he called up to me. "Certainly we've gone far enough to be gettin' somewhere!" he added with a chuckle.

Three times the bucket came up and then I let myself down. The old man should see whether or not he was always to carry the heavy end of the load. I would do the digging for the rest of the day and he should work above—there was a sudden, swift slacking, the rope gave way, and I went crashing to the bottom of the well.

Everything went round in a black, dizzying whirl, shot through with millions of tiny lights. There was nothing anywhere but bright metal dust, whirling madly, and I was in the center of it. At last a voice came, a voice from far away on another planet.

“Billy, Billy boy!”

I opened my eyes. Our old man was bending over me, and I lay on the damp bottom of the well under great coils of rope.

“Billy,” he repeated. I could see a shining in his eyes like tears.

“I’m all right,” I said, and tried to rise on my elbow, but fell back again. The old man caught me in his arms. I think I fainted. Everything became a whirling madness of bright lights. There was a tugging at me to come out of it, and I didn’t want to come out of it; and then again there came the crashing, grinding disintegration of everything, and

out of it I once more opened my eyes. The old man held my head on his knees. He had pushed the rope off my legs.

"I don't think I'm much hurt," I said, but my voice seemed to come from another body a long way off. "I'll be all right in a minute."

"Sure, and as soon's you're sound again in the head, I'll just climb up with that rope and haul you out in no time. No, there now, don't go gettin' ambitious. Just lay still like you are a few minutes. Never saw anythin' like these colts o' youngsters. Can't ye keep still, Billy?"

He spoke sharply and instantly I understood, for I had put my hand down to locate my numbed legs. Both were broken below the knee. I knew now that he had discovered this while removing the rope. I ignored the matter, leaving it to our old man. He moved me to one side, then coiled the rope out of the way; it was a heavy weight. A four-foot diameter does not leave much space for two men and eighty feet of rope.

"Funny how you held tight to the rope, Billy," he said with an attempt at a chuckle. "Come down holdin' tight to it; never let go once, Billy; was holdin' tight all the way. It was the rope failed—you didn't, boy."

"I wonder how it happened?" I said. Still I

seemed far away, as though talking over long distance.

"The knot, Billy; I wouldn't be surprised if you made a common granny knot."

All the time he was working steadily coiling the rope. I had the impression that he was talking to keep me there; that if he stopped the conversation I would slip away. "It was that knot, sure, Billy; first thing I do when we get on top and get you all fixed up good, will be to show you how to tie a square knot. Don't you know the difference, Billy?"

I confessed, weakly, my ignorance of granny and square knots as such.

"Little thing; every boy ought to know it." He took up two ends of the rope, and tied them together, then pulled hard on each one. "That'll never give, Billy, tied that way; that's a square knot. You make two half-hitches, you see; it can't ever pull out. The trouble was, Billy, you didn't know how to make a square knot; I'll show you, plain, so's you'll get it." He was pulling at the rope, testing it, breathing hard. "Soon's ever—we get—you—fixed up! There, that'll hold an elephant. Now, Billy, you just lay low, and keep your eyes covered, when the dust comes, because like's not I'll have to kick out some dust before I get to the top; I gener'llly do kick up a dust gettin' anywhere;

you lay right low, Billy, puttin' your face and your arm on my shirt" — he was pulling it off over his head — "so, so's not to get cold on that damp ground. I'll have you up in a couple o' hours, Billy, or sooner. You'll hold on right tight for a couple o' hours, Billy — ?"

"Sure, I'll hold on!" I was beginning to feel my legs now, and I wanted him to hurry. I was deadily anxious for him to hurry. He fastened the end of the rope to his belt and straddling from side to side started to make his way up the well.

"The Lord — might a' — made me longer — legs if he intended — 'em for climbin' up — four-foot wells," he called back, jocularly, "but they'll reach — and that's enough to ask — they'll reach."

They just would reach and that was all. Slowly, carefully, he climbed, calling back to me continually, apologizing for kicking down dust, waiting till it would settle, then going on again, the short, squat old man, straddling his way up against the tiny patch of sky, the long line of the rope which was attached to his belt, following him. My legs were coming alive faster every minute now. I fixed my eyes on the figure above, and steadied my nerves, and called back to him continually so he would know I was still conscious.

It took him an hour, perhaps, to get sufficiently

far for his voice to come back muffled—and then he stopped, and there was a great rattling of dust and gravel. He had struck the gravel belt. I suddenly remembered that the gravel stratum had widened out, making a concavity in the wall. His legs could never reach across it! I sat up to call to him, but fell back almost with the same breath; he had lost his footing. An instinct for self-preservation made me pull my broken legs and my whole body close into the damp wall. He landed without striking me, on the huge coil of rope, which served to break his fall.

It was my turn to minister, but he had not lost consciousness. Instantly he ran his hands over his body and began to move his limbs. No bones were broken. He could move all his joints. He attempted to stand, but went down in a heap on the rope. It seemed to be his hip.

“This ain’t no ways fair, me takin’ all the beddin’,” he said at last, in an effort at jocularly. He began to pull the rope out from under him. Together we coiled it round and round on the bottom of the well.

“We’re right comfortable, Billy?” he said, when at last we were both crowded on to the rope, my legs being given the preference as to position. “I’ll mebbby rest today, Billy, but tomorrow mornin’ I’ll

be gettin' up again. I'll take the spade next time. I oughta took it this time. I forgot that gravel belt. I'll take the spade tomorrow, Billy."

Dear old man, he was trying to fasten my mind on some point in the plan for escape that would make it practical.

"Of couses," I agreed, "the spade's the thing. If I'd only covered up that pie; and the horses—."

I felt the shiver that went through his body. "Are the horses loose, Billy, so's they can find food and water for themselves? It might take 'em home—huntin' food and water—and they'd be a message to the folks."

"They're loose," I lied. "I forgot to tie up Baldy, and Dandy can get loose without a bit of trouble." This was true of Dandy. But I had tied Baldy; maybe he could break the rope.

The old man sighed. "The poor beasties, they're at the mercy o' the men that owns 'em and works 'em for their livin'. And we—we're at the mercy o' the Lord A'mighty; He'll find a way."

We were both still for a long while after that. I think I slept, though it was more like heavy unconsciousness than sleep. When I awoke again it was with excruciating pain in my legs and a need to move from my cramped position. The old man was instantly awake, if he had been asleep, and helped

me to turn over. I saw a bright star up through our long tube of earth, and thus I knew it was night.

The next morning we faced the facts. The old man's hip was so lame he could scarcely move his leg.

"I told them we'd be through in a week," I said. "I knew we could do the twenty feet in that time, and my mind was made up to go no farther; besides, I could get only twenty feet of rope. Susie knew I got just twenty feet—she rode over with me to the Book-farmer's. If we are not home in a week they will come to see why. Susie will."

I felt sure of this.

The chance of a passer-by was just as probable as if we had landed on the top of a snow peak. I don't suppose anyone had ever come that way, unless it might have been a stray buckaroo. That gave me an idea.

"This would be a right good pocket for a camp for cattle," I suggested.

"No water," the old man said, meeting me honestly in the matter. "I guess your homestead has been one of their choice grazin' spots all right, with that spring of yours; but they wouldn't come here, with no water."

"Still, there are land-lookers coming down now. Bullpit might be taking people out to see land. He

knows this part pretty well. He might bring a party down here."

"Bullpit might," the old man agreed, nodding his head. "He might be our salvation yet—Bullpit."

Even in that awful situation I did not relish owing my life to Bullpit. "Susie will ride over," I added. "She'll borrow a horse and ride over."

"Yes, Susie." The old man was silent a long time. I wondered if his hip were occupying him with its pain; a crushed hip was bad enough, but the inability to stretch out made the matter a thousand times worse.

"You won't never know about it till you're an old man." He spoke at last out of the silence. "It's different—when a little one comes late. The others was fine; oh, but they was fine, and their ma and me was proud, even if we did want a boy. But Susie came late—like a last bloom in a old garden; mebbly you've seen 'em that way, sometimes, in your ma's garden back home—a last bloom in a old garden all winter killed."

"Susie is a wonderful girl!" I choked over the words, for suddenly I did see my mother's old garden; a garden all lilacs and heliotrope and lilies of the valley, flowers with fragrance, memory invoking. I had put my earlier life so completely out of mind

since coming to Happy Valley that now when the old man opened a little door, back it rushed in a thousand pictures. My mother—my father with his sad, twitching, nerve-racked face—and the great, dark, gloomy house that forever shut in a secret and shut out the world; still it was my own and it now cried loudly to me. Was this the end of everything for me, after all the stress and worry—dead, in the bottom of a well!

“It’ll go mighty hard to have anything—not happy—happen to Susie. The rest has ripened up happy; Susie must.” He was silent awhile; then, “Ever notice Susie’s eyes? They twinkle some, Susie’s eyes. I was thinkin’ last night when the stars was a twinklin’—” He broke off. “She’s got her ma’s eyes, Susie has; just like her ma’s when she was a girl.”

“We’ve got to get out of here,” I growled, and made to get up, but fell back in a heap. He caught me, and the strength in his wrist made it a vise. I groaned with the pain.

“You dod-gasted fool of a boy,” he said, in his mild voice. “Just like a colt; not a bit o’ sense.” He kept his hold on my wrist. “We’ll get out of here all right; take our time; take our time; I never was one to hurry.” And after a minute, “Wisht we had that pie.”

"Wish I'd covered it better," I said, imitating his casualness.

"There's no dogs."

"There's coyotes."

I think it must have been along in the afternoon when he pulled out from under us two ends of the rope. I know the pain in my legs had almost disappeared, but I was ravishingly hungry and thirsty. The thirst was the worst. I think maybe he saw me lapping the moist earth with my tongue, though I tried to do it secretly. It was then he pulled out the two ends of the rope. "We might as well put in our time to good advantage," he began gently. "Now, see here; this is the ordinary, every-day granny knot that ninety-nine out of a hundred schoolboys—and all females—will tie." He tied the rope in the usual knot, then he pulled hard on it. "You see, it slips; you ain't got any purchase on it. Now, here's the square knot that every cattleman knows; there; try it; make your two half-hitches—oh, let me." He took it out of my nerveless hands; try as I would, I could not keep my hands from shaking. "See, now—with them two half-hitches, it can't slip."

"I see," I said glibly. "I'll do it right next time."

"Every schoolboy ought to be taught to make a square knot," he went on, seriously. "It ought to

be in the—curriculum; if you'd a been educated right—we wouldn't be down here now—and the coyotes eatin' our pie." He laughed and tried to be very gay, our old man.

That night my tongue became hard and crusty. Again and again I waked from a nightmare of terror and tried to wet my tongue, which no longer seemed to belong in my mouth. I dug in the wet earth, and filled my mouth with it, and held it to my lips—the damp coolness was tantalizing. How far down was water? I now began to question that point as I had never questioned it before. It was my one conscious or unconscious thought; how much farther must we go for water; I tried to dig with my hands; maybe it was but a few feet; you couldn't tell; maybe it was close, close.

Once the old man caught my hands and held them. "Stars is mighty bright," he said. "Look up at 'em, Billy. Stars is mighty bright." He began in a cracked voice to sing, "Lead Kindly Light." I don't know how long it was before I fell asleep, but I think it was not long.

I noticed that our old man had made notches in the wall; there were four; they marked the days. Pain had almost wholly left me; hunger had left me; but the going of pain and hunger only made a greater void for thirst. I now lapped at the well

wall like a mad dog, and the old man did not try to stop me.

At intervals he shouted; someone might pass above—it was possible; but his voice only fell back; I knew it did not reach the top of the well. He pulled out his wallet; he had a check for one hundred dollars. He speculated on what it would buy.

“I was in one of them swell restaurants once in Chicago,” he said. “Oh, but the menu had names on it and prices after ’em. I was some close run then—savin’ to come West—and I didn’t order much; but always I’ve wanted to go back and get some of that special kind o’ grass—patty de foy grass they called it. They asked a big price for just grass. Think how much I could buy with this check; this ain’t no place for a man with money, Billy.”

We played with imaginary menus, ordering with a care and finickiness that neither of us could be capable of save down in a well, and always, tomorrow, his leg would be manageable; tomorrow he would make the climb out with the spade; some way the spade was a great source of comfort; if he had only carried the spade up the first time.

“Dod blast them coyotes.” He would come back to it. “Gettin’ our pie.” Their howling was the

one sound that we heard. It expressed all the misery of man since Adam.

My thirst increased. In a frenzy I tried to dig to water; my lips were swollen and my tongue filled my mouth—a dry, hard, blackened tongue. It was getting unendurable—every moment a madder craving.

There were six notches in the wall; I wondered when our old man had made them; I didn't seem to have seen him; I decided that they just came there of themselves; and now I couldn't distinguish night from day, sleeping hours from wakeful ones. I would see figures all about me. A face would lean over me and smile, and I would smile back, and speak, and then I would hear the old man calling to me: "Billy, Billy boy," and I would blink my eyes and wake up and say peevishly, "What is it? You interrupted—." Then I would remember, and keep still.

Blisters began to form on my legs; great, white, angry blisters; and the thirst gnawed and gnawed. It was now an animal inside of me, growing constantly larger and stronger, my shell of a body almost breaking apart to give it freedom.

There were seven notches. I sat up and sharply denounced our old man. "The week's up," I said, accusingly.

"Yes, Billy; they'll be comin' today; you see they expect us home today; when we don't come, they'll be comin', Billy. Just hold on brave like you've been doin'; hold on brave—."

"Water," I cried, falling back. My eye sockets were burning up; I dug my fingers wildly into the earth. "Water!" I could scarcely speak the word. I turned my face down and began to lap at the earth. "Water."

The stars were shining; our old man was singing, "Lead Kindly Light." Figures were thronging all around me in a wonderful brightness. Women were pouring water from strange, deep jugs; they looked like the women in the child's Bible I had known; they were in flowing robes, with sandals on their feet; they all drew water from a well and poured it out again—now it was a fountain that I saw, and the women were of stone, and the water gushed from all their jugs. The women had strange, blind eyes, and all at once they came alive out of the stone, and their eyes twinkled like stars, and my mother came among them. She was worried and pale and thin with wide, startled eyes full of fear. She was calling, "Billy, Billy." I was fishing now, my bare feet in the water. It was my long day of "hooky" from school. I didn't want to go back home, the water was so deliciously cool and refreshing. I

called back to her, "I'm just fishing, mother." Our old man pulled me into his arms. He was sobbing. I looked up and knew the stars.

The next thing I remember he was climbing up the well. It was daylight. "That's right; go and leave me!" I called jeeringly. The blisters were large and thick now all over my legs. I thought I was dead, and that he was trying to desert me. "Won't stay with a dead man! Afraid to stay with a dead man!" I taunted. He looked back but went on climbing.

Then I knew that I was not dead. I knew that our old man was making one last desperate effort for us both. I knew it was futile, yet the thought of rescue, the faint hope of it revived me, sobered me for a moment. I watched him against that patch of blue, scarcely daring to breathe. The climb would have been difficult enough for the best of men; but with his injured hip and in his weakened condition, it seemed an impossible undertaking.

The dust came down in gritty torrents. It choked me, arousing my agony of thirst so that I cried out. He would stop when it got too bad, and he called back short, panting words of courage to which I tried to respond but instead gave only strange guttural cries that frightened me. As his voice grew fainter and fainter, the horror of loneliness seized

me. Now I was weighted down with a great weight; it was the rope, but now it seemed to be writhing and twisting itself about me like some hideous subterranean reptile, dragging me farther and farther into the bowels of the earth. I thrust out my arms and saw it was only the coil of rope.

I looked up. I knew that it was a useless climb. How could the spade help him? It could not help him. Still I watched him, struggling to keep my reason as he climbed farther and farther away from me, nearer and nearer to escape—to life. When he reached the gravel, would he fall again? How long could he hold his position? What if the spade dropped? He could not possibly climb back; he would slip. A cloud of dust came rattling down; I choked, and buried my face in my arms. It was not dust. It was gravel! It struck the back of my head and ears like a whip. He had reached the spot from which he had fallen before! Our game was up. In an agony I crouched to one side, waiting for him to fall.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RESCUE

THE old man's voice came to me, and I lifted my head to hear.

"They're here, Billy; they're here!"

And then he shouted, "Hello, hello, the well—quick! the well!"

He was fooling me; it was another ruse, I told myself—but I knew better, down deep inside; I knew he told me the truth; and then, looking up, I saw besides the figure of the old man, a face—it was Susie!

The old man was wonderful to the end. "Susie, honey, get all the bridles and splice 'em together, quick. The rope's below."

Susie ran away. It seemed a long time before she came back with the reins. With their help, braced against her young strength, he got out. Instantly he called back to me. "Hold fast, Billy." Then he was gone.

I waited, knowing they would manage it some way; they came back and began letting down yards and yards of string; it was gray-white; they were

cutting up the tent. They sat together on the edge of the well, cutting and tying and letting it down, with only a word from the old man to me now and then. At length it touched me. The old man called: "Tie the rope to it, Billy; tie it hard—a square knot, Billy." It was difficult to do this simple thing.

They pulled the rope up and wound it over the windlass; then the old man contrived a seat for me of the tent's stakes and began to lower it. I sat across the stake, took a firm hold with both hands, and they pulled me out. It was when Susie saw me after I was safely out of the earth that she screamed and hid her face. Poor little "hired girl!" I must have been a sight to make the hardiest nerves fail—a blackened, swollen, blistered, leprous thing of flesh and clay.

They got me on to a roll of blankets, and she made her father lie on his roll.

The water had evaporated from our cans, and the snow was gone. The coyotes had made way with all our cooked food, and the horses had gotten loose and wandered off. Susie and her father consulted in low tones. Susie darted over to her horse, and her father dragged after her. I looked about me. Where was that can of stewed peaches? I crawled off the blankets, crawled around on the ground, looking for it. The coyotes couldn't open a mason jar.

I found it under a clump of sagebrush. They had evidently rolled it about, and fought over it. I cracked off the top with a stone, and put the jar to my lips. I drank till I was ashamed, remembering our old man, but I could not take away my lips. I saw our old man coming back, dragging his leg heavily. Susie had ridden away. I held the jar out to him. He took it and drank, and then we both greedily ate the peaches, every one of them. We lay back on our blankets, and I heard the old man's faint chuckle.

"Well, Billy, we made it."

"Wonder if they've got some more peaches."

"Likely; likely, boy. Leastwise there'll be things that'll taste as good."

I think we slept, stretched on our blankets in the fresh, crisp air—slept and waked by turns; it was good to stretch out. When we waked sometimes we compared experiences.

"Can't never doubt a hereafter, Billy, after that," our old man said. "We went right straight into another world that got awful real the farther we got from this one."

I was thinking the same thing. It had not been a nothingness that I had entered.

Susie came at last with Ed, who was down with supplies. They had brought a farm wagon in which

we could stretch out. Life had no further problems—we could eat and drink—and we could stretch out. Susie sat like one stunned, holding her father's head in her lap, bending and kissing him every minute, and looking at me with eyes like stars, only they didn't twinkle now. I had thought the old man mistaken about Susie's mother ever having had those star eyes. She might—before anxiety took the twinkle out.

They stopped with us at Mother Lattig's, where Mrs. Clark and her other daughters were waiting, and they all wept over us, and bathed us, and fed us hot soup, while Ed swore roundly at the "dom country" and declared we must leave it.

The Book-farmer had ridden off to the Q Ranch to telephone for a doctor. He got back at midnight. I heard his horse's hoofs, and then his message: "You're to carry them both to the Q Ranch," he told Mother Clark and Mother Lattig, who were sitting up with us. "It's Mr. Regan's orders. I heard him give the telephone order. He told the doctor to ride his mounts to death, if necessary; he's ordered relays all along the road from Two Forks. They can't get a car through the tule swamp."

Mother Clark consented at once to our going, provided she could go along. As for Susie, she had not been one minute separated from her father;

there was no question as to whether or not she would go.

They rigged us up in two swinging hammocks of tent canvas, and we set out, Mother Clark in the seat by Ed, who was driving, Susie sitting in the bed of the wagon, holding fast to her father's hand, her steady star eyes fixed on me.

CHAPTER XV

BLUE RIBBONS

I AWOKE in a bed; a wide, soft bed with sheets. I fingered them—yes, they were sheets—and a room with walls papered prettily in dainty cream-colored paper. Straight across from me was a window, and through this window I could see the dead branches of trees; and away beyond the trees were twisting, winding rows of reddish brown willows; they seemed following a vagrant, uncertain stream. Where was the stream trying to get to? Funny stream, why did it try to get anywhere? There was no place especial you could go; you could just keep going. But the stream seemed to be working as hard as though it had a real destination in view.

A figure bent over me—two beautiful gray eyes in a delicate rose-tinted oval face met mine; there was a nurse's cap—and then it all came back.

"Feel better, don't you, to be all nice and clean and shaved?"

"Did they leave me my legs?" I remembered now; remembered a controversy. I had insisted on keeping my legs.

The nurse laughed. There was something familiar in the low, amused laugh. "Yes, you've got your legs, and you're going to keep them." She began to feed me out of a spoon. It was a slow way, but I didn't care. I had my legs. I remembered it all now. The doctor had been stubborn—but I still had my legs. I tried to move them; they felt stiff and awkward in their splints.

"How is our old man?"

"He's doing fine, too."

"He's the important one of us. He's the one that matters." Some way I was afraid they wouldn't look after him just right. "His hip is bad," I explained. "Did you look at his hip?"

"He's a wonderful old man," the nurse said. "He's a great old man."

"He's the important one of us," I reiterated, trying to sit up. "You see, there's Susie and—."

I forgot what it was I wanted to tell her. She said, "Yes, yes," and drew the blind and urged me to sleep. She gave me a spoonful of something. I think I slept.

The next thing I remember was when he came in—John Regan, the man who had put the Lattig-mother responsibility on me; who had said that young men were an asset. He advanced to the bed,

holding out his strong, brown hand. "Well, well," he said in a hearty voice that some way had a world of kindness in it. "So it's treating you pretty rough—this pioneering. But you kept your legs." He laughed sympathetically. There must have been quite a struggle. He drew up a chair and sat down, his big, strong, firm hand still holding my thin, white one. I felt ashamed of my weakness. Would I ever have a hand like that? The man wasn't much taller than I, I remembered; I had as much of a frame—would I ever fill it out? And all the time he was looking steadily into my face with his intent, blue-gray eyes. It was a wholesome sympathy that he sent out; a strengthening sympathy without any pity in it. The man's presence was like the strong, keen air of Happy Valley. There was strength and courage in it.

"You're going to pull through, Billy, and be all the better for it," he said, dominantly. "It does something to a man—an experience like that. You'll be all the better for it."

"Not richer, though," I protested, more, I think, from the need to say something than anything else. "I'll lose my claim. I've been off it now a long time."

"We'll fix that; don't you worry. Uncle Sam is pretty good when it comes to accidents. We'll

look out for your claim. You just have a real good time getting well."

He drew out his checkbook and signed several checks. He tore them loose, and handed them to me. "Just fill in any sum you might be needing. Maybe there's someone back East you'd like to send for to visit with you while you're getting well. Lizbeth will write for you."

I turned away my face; was there ever such a country on earth? such kindness? such people?

"There isn't anyone," I choked out. "I'm not of much account—back there. I guess I'm a sort of black sheep. People back East are—different—to a fellow—that's down."

"They never had much chance," he said, sort of speculatively. "They've always been herded back there—haven't had much chance to think straight out of life and for themselves. Make an excuse for 'em, Billy, and forget it. Don't ever let a bitter thought get in. It's like a poison weed in a garden. They never had much chance. And as for that other—it's queer what'll cure a man. I've tried a lot of things with my men. Keeley does it for some. Starving will do it for you. Funny, how starving's a cure for a lot of things. The Indians knew; they starved—for lots of things. It's a stomach disease—and this has taken it out of you, you'll find, when

you're about again. Might as well stay in the country, though, till you're strong as a mule."

A wonderful light flooded me—the starving might have done it. For that I would have given up—my legs. I couldn't speak, but I reached out for his hand. For the second time he had made me strong.

I lay quietly hour by hour, and the days went by. Sometimes Susie came in; Susie, whose eyes had not regained their twinkle. Once when she came and no one was in the room, I put my hand out to her. She quickly took it and impulsively put her head down on my breast. "Oh, Billy!" That was all she said. She cried several minutes. I stroked her fair hair and patted her heaving shoulder. It was all I could do for my little "hired girl." Presently she dried her eyes and lifted her head. Her eyes were brave, but Oh, so sad! The shock had not lifted. Always when I asked about her father, they told me he was doing splendidly.

One day it occurred to me that it was queer he did not come to see me. I asked Lizbeth, the nurse with the gray eyes, about it. She was a niece of John Regan's; a slim, lively, young girl with a ready wit. I liked Lizbeth tremendously. She said funny things sometimes when I grew restless, and she particularly wanted me to lie still. She would threaten

to coil up and zip at me—playing rattlesnake—if I so much as moved. We were good pals. I asked

her why our old man didn't come to see me. He had been able to walk.

"Well, of all the nerve!" she exclaimed. "One sick man wants another to visit him. Why don't you go see him?" And then she spoke seriously. "We think it best for him not to move around for awhile. His will kept him going when it was necessary."

Mother Clark came to see me every day, and always her eyes

were brave and sad—like Susie's. I wondered if ever they had twinkled, or if the old man had



Lizbeth

imagined it. She always stooped and kissed me like a real mother, and stroked back my hair, slowly and tenderly, with her hard, calloused hand. She said very little. She seemed preoccupied. Susie sometimes stayed and read to me, but Mother Clark's visits were brief. Already Susie and Lizbeth were close friends, and walked about with their arms around each other, as girls will. I wondered if Lizbeth had been lonesome for a girl of her own age, too. She was older than Susie—she must have been nearer my age. But Susie looked older these days.

One day I asked Lizbeth, "Could you get me some blue ribbon?"

She looked at me strangely.

"I want some—I've wanted it a long time," I said peevishly.

"Any special kind?" she asked, still watching me. Then she put her fingers on my pulse.

"I'm all right," I drew away crossly. "I just want that ribbon—the kind girls make into bows for their hair."

"Uncle John is going to town today," she said. "You can give him any commissions. He's not very good at remembering little things like that, but I'll put it on the list. He's got an eye to get, too."

"An eye?"

"Yes; Lon's glass eye exploded. He is to bring him back an eye. I'll tell him about the ribbon."

A great weight lifted; I was to have Susie's hair ribbon.

Another woman came in sometimes; she was fair and blue-eyed and pretty. She laughed a good deal and said funny things, too. They said she was Mrs. Todd, wife of Dave Todd, foreman of the ranch.

One day I thought, who is the family here? I asked Lizbeth. "It's Uncle John's home," she explained. "I live with him sometimes, and Mrs. Todd runs the house, and then there are the men."

I wanted to know what men; I was getting interested in the world about me.

"The buckaroos—there are about thirty, and the cook. Lon is the cook; Lon is much concerned about his two invalids. I think he would like to come and see you when he gets his eye. Lon is a proud chap. He won't come without his eye. He won't wait on table. Susie does it for him now."

I didn't like this. "Susie is my little hired girl," my lips said pettishly.

"Yes, of course," she hurried to agree. "She is just helping Lon out at the cookhouse—till he gets his eye. You wouldn't expect a man to wait on table with just one eye, would you?"

"Of course not," I conceded.

I had a dim impression that I was being humored. I shut up.

It was a long time to wait for the ribbon, but it came at last. Mr. Regan had gone in the car, he explained to me as he came in, and got stuck in the swamp on the way back; the roads were pretty bad now; Dave Todd had had to send a team to pull him into the ranch. I accepted his explanation of the delay. It was a good enough excuse; but I couldn't accept the ribbon; it was baby ribbon, a bolt of it; I pushed it away in disgust.

"Poor Uncle John," Lizbeth said, while I still fumed over the ribbon. She sighed. "He did his best, but he never thought to be particular about the eye, either, and Lon's one eye is large and light blue, and he brought him a small, black, shoe-button one; Lon's mad, too." She fingered the despised baby ribbon. "Uncle John did his best; he just didn't know — about eyes and hair ribbon."

I was partly mollified.

"And Lon's quit; lit out for town; won't be laughed at by the boys; you see he put in the new eye, and the boys howled; it was wrong of them to howl. Mrs. Clark is to cook for us now."

I was really appeased, but I couldn't give in all at once, so I said nothing.

The days wore on. Susie came in one morning, her eyes brighter.

"Oh, Billy," she cried, kneeling beside my bed and again resting her head on my breast. "Oh, Billy, we are all so happy."

"Happy?" I echoed. I wondered why, especially.

"Oh, because of everything, Billy. You've got your title to your ranch, and Pa's got his. Uncle John had Uncle Sam fix it up. You don't have to go back to it."

"Uncle John?"

"We all call him that; we got it from Lizbeth."

I remember the day I thought with embarrassment and confusion of the ribbons I had ordered for Susie. I surmise that was the day the fever wholly left me. And then I asked for a mirror. Lizbeth laughed at me.

"Conceited old thing," she said.

I insisted on the mirror.

"There isn't one about," said Lizbeth, looking all around the room. "Funny—so few women here, and men don't generally care for mirrors." I looked across to the dresser; the mirror had been taken away. I was sure there had been one when I first came to the room. I said so.

"Well, we had to fix up a room for Mrs. Clark and Susie, didn't we? This is Uncle John's best

guest chamber. We couldn't give you the best room and its furnishings, too, could we?"

"Lizabeth," I said, "you're a fine girl — but please let me know the worst. What do I look like?"

"A silly, obstinate man."

What had happened to me? My face had not been hurt in the fall, and even though I were thin and emaciated, I ought not to be too frightful a sight for my own eyes. What were they hiding? I ran my hand through my hair in an effort to think. My hair, heavy and dark, had been my mother's pride when I was little; it had been a football mop at Tech, and later I had worn a Byronic lock over my forehead. People had said I looked like a poet or an artist. I had affected the pose for a while. I now had an idea. I seized several hairs and pulled them out. They were snow white. I hid the hairs and did not again ask for a mirror.

Susie came in one day with a city paper in her hand. "See, Billy," she said, holding a full illustrated page before me, "we're all written up!"

There were pictures of the tents and an extensive story of Tenttown. I wanted to read it.

"I'll read it to you," she said, taking the paper away from me. She read me the account.

"A newspaper man was in Two Forks writing up the country when you were rescued from the well,"

she explained, "and he came on down to get the story; then he went on into Happy Valley to see Tenttown. It will probably start a lot of settlers down that way. Pa's awfully pleased."

"When am I to see him?" I demanded.

"Soon, Billy," and she bent and kissed my head; then she went out, carrying the paper. I wanted the paper.

They helped me out of bed every day now, and I sat by the window for hours watching the naked brown trees and the far-off hills. I had not known before that naked trees were beautiful.

Mr. Regan came in one day. "Ever drive a car?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Tom wants to go down to his ranch; there will be quite a move on among settlers this spring, and Tom feels uneasy; he's been off his claim all winter; he thinks he must get down, too, on account of his mother. I'm wondering, when you get stronger, if you could drive my car."

"I'd like the chance. I wanted to put a crop in this spring—but—" I glanced over my emaciated person. "I'd like the chance, Mr. Regan."

"Then you're hired, Billy; you're hired."

I handed him back his signed checks. "I don't need them," I exclaimed, "except to pay my bills—

there's the doctor and nurse—the drug store—and Van Vader—they'll maybe wait till I earn it."

"They'll wait, Billy." He held the checks in his hand a few minutes, then, "Maybe you'd like to pay them up and be in debt just to me."

I thought it over. I decided to do it, and he returned the checks to me.

At last they said I could go down stairs. I was impatient to get out. I was sure my legs were sound, and I wanted to touch earth. There was a feeling of spring in the air and I wanted to bathe in it, drink it deeply. I had insisted on getting out for days, and at last Lizbeth sat down beside me to talk it over.

"You know," she said, "everyone thought you would lose both legs; you fought so—that was all that decided the doctor to try letting you keep them; you fought so you made the fever worse; it was a fight for your life any way, with the fever. But you kept your legs. We didn't think at first there was any such danger for Mr. Clark, but the bruise had affected the bone."

I sat up suddenly. "Has our old man lost his leg?" I demanded.

"Yes," Lizbeth admitted. "You see, he kept up so well that we didn't think it necessary at first, but it got to be his leg or his life. His age was

against him, though he is so healthy; he's pulled through, though, remarkably."

I was still very weak; I buried my face in my hands. Poor little Susie, poor Mother Clark, what they had been through! She put her arm about my shoulders; Lizbeth was a dear girl; I would have loved a sister like that. "If you let it make you sick," she remonstrated, "no telling when you will get out. And it will do him good to see you. I thought I would cut your hair first—and get you all fixed up nice with a fresh shave, and then—."

"Yes, Lizbeth, do. I know it's white—don't mind me, but it might shock our old man. Cut it, Lizbeth."

He was on the porch in a wheel chair, covered over with a Navajo blanket. He sat up and called to me, as I hobbled along on crutches, for they would not allow me to put my weight on my feet.

"Well, well, Billy," he cried cheerily, "if this ain't like old times. All of us here again. Well, well, Billy!" I sat down beside him in a chair Lizbeth had made ready, and our hands clasped. Susie was sitting on a step at his feet, her hand stroking a handsome hound's head, her star eyes fixed on me.

"So they grayed up your hair a bit, old man?"

He brisked into it, and it was really better to have it over. "And took one of my legs—."

"But we're still here," I chimed in. "They can't get rid of us."

Mr. Regan came around the house, a broad paternal smile on his face, his blue-gray eyes shining. He wore a bright red tie and a wide slouch hat; but though dressed conventionally, otherwise he looked different from other men. His picturesqueness was not a matter of clothes—it was character.

"You're the kind of settlers the country needs," he said, sitting down on the step by Susie, and dropping his strong, steady hand over the dog's shoulder. "These can't-do-it settlers can pass on as fast as they like, but you stickers—well, I guess you're fully initiated into the country now." He chuckled, then turned to me and asked in a kindly, sympathetic voice: "How is it, Billy? Feel pretty good?"

A new tenderly-happy feeling swept over me like a wave of soft, warm water. "That's it," I said to him, "I do feel good."

Susie looked up from the hound and smiled bravely; Susie, with her poor little ribbons faded out white, and the twinkle still absent from her star eyes.

BOOK II

CHAPTER XVI

LEPPIES, AND OTHER THINGS

DAY melted into day, and the soft beauty of spring spread over the land, greening it up with new life in tules and grasses and willows. We fitted into and became a part of a new life of our own, intensely fascinating and unconsciously theatrical. There was about it the hazy atmosphere of a dream let in between rock-ribbed realities. It was a play on which the curtain might ring down at any moment, leaving a stark-bare stage and actors without the grease paint.

We sat on the wide veranda of the big, white ranchhouse known as The Willows, whose spreading wings symbolized the wide-spreading protectiveness of its owner's sheltering arms, and talked lazily of many things. We rode over the ranch in the car—our old man and I—and we hobbled about on our crutches to the cookhouse, the bunkhouse, the blacksmith shop, old Sody's livestock headquarters, the dog kennels, and every other place where life and curiosity attracted. We were the audience and the play went on for our benefit. And they

thought, no doubt—the buckaroos, Lizbeth, Mrs. Todd, Mr. Regan—that we were the play and they the audience. We were the sensation that circumstances had projected into the quiet routine of their days.

It was quite as though we had been tossed onto another planet, so different was this from every other phase of life I had known; so different from the pioneer life among the homesteaders. The very physical outlook was different by reason of shimmering-leafed poplar trees which hedged us in from the desert, while beyond, green willows threaded the paler green of the tule swamp. On the horizon, however, lay the same far-off mystic hills bathed in their wonderful lavender and gold.

Our compound itself was unique. The great ranchhouse, roomy and rambling, was a network of surprising hallways and stairways that led to large, well-lighted chambers. Each addition might have been the result of a different person's whim, but the whole was somehow consistent. Semi-circularly about the ranchhouse were the foreman's house, the bunkhouses, the store building, and still farther away another rambling group made up of barns, corrals, cattle pens, pig pens, smoke houses, chicken houses, duck ponds, and dog kennels.

At five each morning a gong waked the settle-

ment to activity. Dogs began to bark, the baying of hounds mixing weirdly with the viperish snapping of terriers and the gruffer notes of wolf dogs in which there was a strain of coyote. Buckaroos emerged from bunkhouses—lithe, bronzed, young men, with an occasional grizzled old scout who had fought in Indian wars, and there was one ex-soldier who had been a West Point man. The buckaroo boss, Raz Poole, was a blond giant under thirty, with a sweet tenor voice and a way of looking out from under drooped eyelids that left you wondering about him.

There was a squat little Mexican who rolled endless cigarettes and was excessively polite. Mex had been noted over the whole range in earlier years for his way of calling the cattle. He had a never-wearying song and it could be heard over miles of space. The cattle listened for it. It kept them easy and steady on a long drive. Many a day, Mr. Regan told me, he had ridden into the hills just to hear old Mex's cattle call as it echoed and re-echoed from glade to glade.

Old Sody, I think, was the most important person on the Q Ranch—Old Sody, chief of the leppies, with his wall eyes that peered nearsightedly, toothless gums, short, rapid steps, all the dogs at his heels and a "leppy" under his arm. The little orphan

things were called "leppies," a corruption, so far as I could determine, from "left" or "lefty"—any little young thing left without its natural protectors.

Chickens, pigs, colts, calves, mules, dogs, kittens—they were all adopted by old Sody, who knew them like children and loved them as well. I don't think a group of us ever sat talking quietly together that old Sody didn't come tearing wildly onto the scene with, "Duck lost—anybody seen a little, yellow duck with one eye? Duck lost—duck lost." Or maybe it would be a setting hen that had gone astray, or a pup that hadn't come in for his milk.

No one laughed at old Sody. He would pass on, muttering to himself, his eyes wildly excited, hardly waiting to hear the suggestion that the tules or the willows probably held the renegade. He had dug a fortune out of Alaska and he had lost it in Ari-



Old Sody

zona borax; and now he took care of little "leppies" for his board and bed and the good of his soul.

A Dutchman was putting away hog meat in one of the outhouses; a big, heavy, slow Dutchman, who tasted ponderously and brought frequent tastings to Mrs. Todd. The weight of nations rested on a decision between less spice and more sage. You would have believed it had you seen the foreman's wife as she tasted and tasted, her head to one side, her forehead puckered into a frown. She was a wonderful little woman, Mrs. Todd, a born diplomat.

Camped in one of the cabins was a family that seemed always to have belonged to the Q Ranch, though they had recently come in from chopping wood in the hills. There was old Hank, long-faced, sad-eyed, and gloomy, and old Nance, his wife, a lean, bony structure with a voice that grated like a file but ruled her household. Numerous grandchildren clung to the two for support, and old Nance was not above playing favorites. Every morning after the gong and the yowling and howling of the dogs came her sharp voice: "Dan, you son of a gun, hit the plank!" And almost immediately: "Trudy, Trudy dear, hadn't you better get up?" Mrs. Todd insisted that in spite of her peculiarities, old Nance was sound at the core.

My first introduction to old Hank was the day he got in from the hills. All afternoon he sat on the porch in gaunt, watery-eyed silence waiting for Mr. Regan who was expected back from Two Forks. Now and then he would lift his hard, brown arm and draw his coarse, blue gingham shirtsleeve across his eye, then the arm would drop heavily to his side. At last the car arrived and Mr. Regan came briskly up the walk. His smile broadened and his Irish blue eyes lighted up when he saw old Hank. "Well, well, Hank," he said, putting out his hand, "how are you?" Hank limply gave him his hand but his gloomy face did not lighten.

"John," he said, "John, do you think wood-choppin's goin' to run out?"

I went on to the car, for I was to take the foreman over the ranch, but neither could I smile any more than had Regan as he sat down to talk things over with the old retainer. For thirty years he had chopped the Q Ranch wood. The indictment had filled him with uneasiness. Suppose wood-chopping should run out!

When we got back from our drive there was a big excitement. Everyone on the ranch had collected about a foaming horse and his rider—Old Sody with a "leppy" pig squealing under his arm, and toothless mouth agape, the Mexican with a half-

rolled cigarette, Susie and Lizbeth with horrified faces. The foreman's pretty wife stood nonchalantly in the porch as one who had lived her life in the midst of disasters and was not to be upset by them. We climbed out of the car and hurried to the group. I had recognized the Book-farmer.

There was bad news from Happy Valley. Someone had set fire to the Dutchman's barn and toolshed. It had happened in the night when everyone was sleeping soundly. Six of the horses had had to be shot; two were dead before the fire was discovered. When the Book-farmer left, the Dutchman was sitting on a nail keg with his head in his hands, saying over and over to himself: "I was dwendy years saving for it; dwendy years."

Our old man, resting on his crutches, shook his head sadly, while Mother Clark cried in her apron.

"Poor Leeda," Susie said. "Oh, poor Leeda!" She went on to explain to Lizbeth that she and Leeda had planned to go away to school that winter, the only difference being that Leeda had been sure of going and she wasn't. "And I was envying Leeda." She gulped and turned away.

"That pretty white mare with the star in her forehead that he bought of Tom Lattig—was that one killed, too?" our old man wanted to know.

"Who is suspected?" Mr. Regan asked.

"A white-skinned man—waxy—with a black mustache and yellow in his eyes. He located on a ranch on south. He passed through that afternoon on his way to Two Forks. He asked for dinner, but the Dutchies were all busy; they told him he could go in the kitchen and cook something for himself. It seemed to make him mad. That's the only clue."

The description was that of the man Bullpit had brought into the country to jump my claim.

"Boys, I gotta get back," said our old man, beginning to move about on his crutches, "I see I gotta get back."

"Oh, pa! What can you do?" Mother Clark took her apron from her reddened eyes.

"I gotta get back," he repeated excitedly.

"Yes, Clark, you've got to get back," agreed Mr. Regan. "There isn't any other way; you've got to get back."

We all looked at him blankly. His eyes were meeting Clark's; the two men seemed to understand each other.

"It would have burned just the same if you'd been there," persisted Mother Clark. She seemed to dread ever re-entering Happy Valley.

"I gotta get back." Our old man began hobbling toward the porch. He seemed on the point of start-

ing at once. Mr. Regan was talking with Dave Todd. He was instructing him to get up two good teams to send down to the Dutchman so he could go on with his ranch work. "He mustn't leave," I overheard him say to Dave. "Tell the Book-farmer he's to call on us for whatever he needs to see him through. He mustn't leave the country."

He went back to the porch and sat down by our old man. I joined them. Mother Clark had gone on to the cookhouse, Susie and Lizbeth following her.

"I've been thinking some days," said Mr. Regan, drawing a chair up to our old man, "that it's mighty hard on the homesteaders going down into Happy Valley and on south to find their land, then driving clear back to Two Forks to file. We ought to have a commissioner down there. We ought to get the county to appoint a commissioner. I think the filing fee is two dollars and a half; I'm told they are filing at the rate of two or three a day. Yes, we've got to have a commissioner down there." He was looking at our old man intently.

"I'd hate awful bad to take the money when a man's gettin' him a piece o' land, but—."

"It's the only way, Clark; you're right; you'd better go back and be commissioner. I'll see about it."

It was arranged that Susie should go with her father while Mother Clark should remain at the cookhouse for a while longer. Mr. Regan needed a cook, and the Clarks needed the money; and so, though a break in this little family was a real tragedy to each one of the three, still, because of dire necessity, the plan was accepted. There was one compensation for the departure of my little hired girl: that evening Bullpit arrived at the Q Ranch; Bullpit in the glory of new clothes and leather trappings. I looked quickly to Mr. Regan as I recognized the rider who stopped at the gate. My subconscious mind connected the fire some way with him, possibly because I connected the waxy-faced homesteader with him. I wondered if Mr. Regan would not order him off the ranch. But somewhat to my surprise he was received courteously.

CHAPTER XVII

SORROW IN THE VALLEY

MY FIRST impression on meeting John Regan had been that here was a most picturesque character, the pure type of the western cattleman. After his treatment of me and the Clarks, I put him down as a very prince of generosity. As we drove together over the long roads day after day alone in the car, the sheer force of the man began to loom monumental. Here was a mind and a heart and an understanding of conditions all over the country and of humanity, such as I had not met before in anyone. He was not a type, he was a gigantic exception.

My grandfather was a man of keen intellect, an astute lawyer, a just judge, a product of the best schools and the widest experience in metropolitan affairs, but he seemed a pigmy in comparison. I now knew that he lacked an intense and penetrating human sympathy which is as illuminating on human problems as light on darkness. Here was a man who sensed the most subtle phases of a situation, a man who had never gone to school, who had not



Uncle John Regan

read books, but who knew life and people as my grandfather his law.

After I had ridden about with him for a week, I felt that whatever he undertook must eventually come to pass—barring illness or death. Things would have to capitulate to John Regan; he would never capitulate to things. His huge frame, his square, well-filled-out shoulders, his strong, solid thighs composed the proper engine for the use of the tremendous force which was himself.

No one took liberties with him—everyone felt his superiority—hence it never became necessary for him to wear that austerity which is the cloak for lesser natures. As he stood talking with some idle citizen on a street corner in Two Forks, a little child, running along with his red wagon, would rub up against him, throw chubby arms about his leg, and stand there as if he felt protected. Unconsciously Regan's hand would go down to the little head; he would pat the sun- and wind-roughened cheek, and the child would run happily along. Men approached him with equal readiness, especially men in trouble.

A trampish-looking man accosted him one day, and I stepped aside, thinking the man wanted the price of a drink; but he only wanted work. We moved on—after Regan had told him to get a

horse from Van Vader and report at the Q Ranch. I found later that the man had just finished a term in the penitentiary for cattle stealing, and it had been Regan's cattle he had stolen. But Regan had been the one to whom he applied for work when he got out of jail and Regan had again trusted him. We took home with us on the same trip two men who had returned from a drink-cure institute. Good men, Regan explained to me, but they couldn't keep sober. He had sent them away for the cure and he was giving them another chance. I understood now some pictures I had seen on the bunkhouse walls; rudely-colored prints of men in various disgusting states of intoxication. He was not above the silent object lesson and he was not beneath more heroic measures.

All spring, settlers came into the country. The land craze was getting them—also the talk of a railroad of which we constantly heard vague rumors. The back-to-the-land movement was putting businesses, houses, and minor possessions into prairie schooners, teams, and plows. With each outfit that we passed, Mr. Regan grew more serious. Sometimes he would sink into a silence that would last for hours. Often he would come out of it with a story of early days which he told in a way that was all a part of his genius. Always as you finished

your laugh with the humorist you became gravely thoughtful with the philosopher.

Through him I came at last fully to know the country I was in. The awakening was a strange experience. It was like seeing eyes back of the closed blinds of an old building one has regarded as tenantless. John Regan opened the blinds. Always I had thought of the country as new, virgin, and untouched. I now learned that it was an old country over which battles had been fought, nearly every section of which had been wet with human blood.

The fence laws of California started its settlement, it seemed. Cattlemen had been driven north in the late seventies in search of open range. They found it in this great closed-in empire; it was an immense country with quantities of wild grass and an abundance of water. To find this cattle man's Eden was to appropriate it. A few of the hardest — and hardest — acquired large tracts of land from the government, and defied encroachment. Weaker men who were lured in by the richness of the country and the hope of railroads were forced out. Settlers were not wanted; settlers fenced; settlers interfered with range and water. In time the powerful cattle companies controlled the whole country.

Young John Regan — not yet twenty — came over the mountains from a coast valley in Western Oregon, driving a small band of cattle. His father — a cattleman and rancher — when crossing the plains in the forties had passed through the great sweeping valleys of the inland empire and had never forgot them. Years later, when his youngest boy was ready to start for himself, and his own health failing, with little to give but advice, he took this son to the top of the Cascade Mountains, and pointing across to the plains country that lay to the east, he said, "Go, my son, go over there where there is room to grow." He had vision and he saw the country's future.

And so John Regan went. In time he got hold of land and he traded in cattle. When his growth became noticeable, when he seemed likely as a coming cattleman, he received attractive offers to leave the country, as had others before him. One man offered him forty thousand dollars in gold to get out.

But Regan stuck; he stuck through the early gun days, those days of continual range fights between settler and cattle man. He saw man after man run out of the country for committing the crime of accepting Uncle Sam's offer to make a home for himself on Government land. He saw bloodshed; but still he stuck. His enemies were powerful cattle

companies with unlimited capital and without scruple. They had the idea firmly fixed that the country was all theirs; that anyone who tried to get a foothold was their natural enemy. But Regan was strong in body and spirit, fearless, and a natural born handler of men; also he was a natural born fighter. They didn't always get the best of him.

After years of fight came his great opportunity. The owner of the Q Ranch, the cattleman most hated by the settlers and the leader of the perpetual war on them, got a bullet between his shoulders one day and fell headlong from his horse. This put the Q Ranch on the market; one hundred and fifty thousand acres, much of it tule swamp, but more in natural hay. It became a question who should own this ranch, who dared own it, who was there that no settler wanted to kill? Before the other big cattle companies realized that he was a real competitor in so huge a venture, John Regan had acquired control of the ranch.

Many flattering offers followed—and inviting to a young man all alone with a heavy indebtedness. He could not see his way, but he staggered on alone. He refused to enter the combination against the settlers. The gauntlet was thrown down from that hour. They put every conceivable obstacle in his path; they used unlimited power and money to

hamper him. The several big companies interested in preserving the open range now consolidated under one name, the Oceanic Cattle Company. This gave them a solid front with which to resist invasion. They issued an ultimatum that John Regan or his buckaroos could no longer ride the range with their buckaroos, that he could not gather in his cattle with them, nor would he be shown any of the usual amenities of the range.

The monopoly by the Oceanic Company of all the waste water from the Two Forks River had long appealed to John Regan as unjust to the settlers. The Oceanic Company based their claim on the old English riparian law that water must be allowed to flow as it will, unpolluted and undiminished. John Regan disputed their claim in the courts. The smaller settlers were eagerly with him at the opening of the fight, but after giving their evidence they began to compromise with the Oceanic Cattle Company, accepting whatever they were offered rather than go on with litigation. The case was in the courts three years, with a final victory for John Regan. The development of the country through irrigation and settlement had always been his idea of its future. He believed that the Two Forks River could be made to irrigate a large territory. He put surveyors into the field and proved this to be

true. Then he got an option to put the water on the land under a government act.

The Oceanic Cattle Company fought him consistently. Lawsuits were instituted on the slightest pretext. He was again approached with flattering offers; they came even from Alaska; all the world was made attractive to him save his own cattle range. And still he went on with his stubborn fight for irrigation and settlement. One day when making a short cut across Oceanic Cattle land he met Cruikshank, the company's superintendent. He had fought Regan for many years, and now Regan was gaining on him. He was nerve-racked and grouchy. He ordered Regan off: "Never again set foot on Oceanic Cattle land," he commanded.

"Very well," John Regan answered, "but any time you find it convenient don't hesitate to cross my land."

The fight took a personal turn. It was now between man and man. All these years Regan had been like a little young growing thing in a prize ring. He had used all his diplomacy to keep his back from being broken while he was growing up. He now began to strike some blows. It was a period in the country's history when everyone was discouraged. The range was eaten out and there was no profit in the stock business. Many smaller cattle-

men had debts to carry and they were glad to sell out. Settlers who had come in bent on farming, confidently expecting a railroad, were unable to get the price of haul out of their crops. Railroads had been promised, time and again, but only surveyors materialized. That very summer of keenest discouragement fifteen crews were busy at one time in the inland empire.

Already heavily in debt, knowing the exact situation, but unwilling to quit the struggle, Regan drew paper against himself on thirty and sixty days' time and bought more land. He acquired a space of country one hundred and twenty miles wide, cutting in between the big Oceanic Cattle ranches. They found themselves in the position of not being able to get a camping place without asking him a favor.

He now began to suffer that punishment which is the hardest on earth to bear: The powerful Oceanic Cattle Company made it known to merchants of Two Forks that their friendship for John Regan would be interpreted as enmity to them. Oceanic Cattle bought more goods than all the rest of the country put together. The merchants were dependent on them. Oceanic Cattle let it be known that they would run any man out of the country who showed friendship for John Regan. And Two Forks was not strong enough to rise up and take

John Regan's side; Oceanic Cattle did nothing to develop the country; they dug no ditches, drained no swamps, farmed no land, built no houses, and steadily fought all plans for development; but Regan's business was not a drop in the bucket to theirs. And so Regan's old neighbors began to pass him on the street with heads down, while all the time they watched him covertly, paying him the secret tribute of a mighty respect.

Alone he went his way. His plan was the settlement of the country, for people would bring railroads and railroads would mean moved crops and prosperity. The only hope was to break up the isolation. Irrigation ditches would bring in large colonies of people and people would compel a railroad. John Regan's fight to wrest control of the water from Oceanic Cattle was with the idea of constructing such ditches; the Tule Valley canal had been the first attempt. Oceanic Cattle had—through the government agent who had been set on by Bullpit—stopped the canal. Bullpit had pointed the way to a trouble-hunting agent, but the way had been pointed in turn for Bullpit by the powerful Oceanic Cattle Company. They had Regan cornered now; they had got him indicted and stopped his canal; but the next move would be his.

All that summer I drove Mr. Regan's car. We

always called at every little shack to make sure that no one was in trouble. I could not pass a well without looking into it.

As autumn came on a protest arose here and there against the lack of schools. Mothers on isolated ranches were beginning to worry over the possibility of their children growing up in ignorance. Mr. Regan became seriously concerned. The children must have a school. They must not pay the penalty of their parents' pioneering. Every American child was entitled to schooling. At the end of a long day's drive early in September he outlined his plan to me.

"We'll apply for a school district, Billy; it will have to be about sixty miles long, I figure, to take in all the children scattered over this country up to Wind Mountain. You go to work on that, Billy. Make an application to the county court for a school district."

"But how can children go to school over a district sixty miles long?" I objected.

"We'll have to centralize the school, Billy. We'll have it at the Q Ranch. We'll keep the children there while they go to school."

There were not more than twenty children altogether, but it was a good many to house and bed and feed. However, that problem was up to Lizbeth.

Lizbeth put her head on one side when I told her about it and her large, gray eyes filled with tender amusement. "I'm only glad he isn't asking their parents to come along," she said. Then, "Dear Uncle John, he would take them all in if he could." Lizbeth had just one passion, her Uncle John. She went to work on the problem and turned two of the largest rooms into a dormitory, moved in cots, and prepared to house our school children while I got the district organized and put the plan before the parents. We found a teacher, a young woman who had quit college in her senior year to take up a homestead and was glad of a chance to earn money while holding down her claim. In appearance she was of a thin, delicate pink and whiteness that made me think of fine china, but she was an intelligent young person, and lively, and I foresaw that she and Lizbeth would make a great team. I wondered about the very good-looking buckaroo boss, Raz Poole, who rode away each morning singing of his lady fair; Lizbeth's and Susie's eyes had had a way of following him. Would the pink and white teacher's eyes follow him too? Would Bullpit come fussily about, displaying his leather calves and presenting his fly-specked boxes of candy? Bullpit was still locating occasional homesteaders and this brought him frequently to the Q Ranch, the only

stopping point between Two Forks and Happy Valley. He blissfully ignored my presence. It was just as well.

Mother Clark had to have additional help with her family of school children, so I set out to find the right person. Perhaps some homesteader's wife or daughter especially needed a chance to earn something. In the search I drove over Wind Mountain into Happy Valley for the first time since I was carried out of it. The Dutchman's ranch was a sorry sight with work at a standstill and the blackened remains of his barn testifying to disaster. I found the Dutchman sitting moodily in his doorway, staring into space. To cheer him I spoke of his pigs. No one in the valley had so many squealing, squirming young pigs. "My wife, she raise more pigs dan any body else," he said. It was a momentary return of his former pride in his possessions; but he lapsed at once into morose silence. I drove on to the Clark's and Susie came running to meet me. She got in and settled comfortably down in the car.

"It spoils a body," she said, with a happy sigh.

"What does?"

"Oh, staying at Mr. Regan's and having the car and everything. I wish I were rich!"

"You are," I replied. Her wholesome face was

good to see, but the look of sadness had stayed with her. "Rich in all but ribbons." I touched the smooth, flaxen braids coiled about her head. She wore no ribbons.

"I'm getting too old for hair ribbons. How's mother?"

"She is well, but has an increase in family." I explained the twenty school children and my errand. "Come along," I said. "I am driving all over the valley. I'll bring you back."

She gladly consented, and after a word with her father, who hobbled up the steps of the dug-out to greet me, we drove off.

"He's a wonderful old man." I could not help saying it, though I had said it so often.

She lifted her chin a little proudly, but made no reply. I imagined he wasn't so well—he looked thin. Was she keeping it from me to keep it from her mother? She was a great little Susie, so reticent and yet so frank. She became gay at once and wanted news of Lizbeth. I told her of the new school teacher and her pretty blue eyes.

"Did you say 'pretty' blue eyes?" she wanted to know with unexpected archness.

"Just pretty, that's all; not star eyes."

She laughed and blushed and began telling me

most excitedly about the new homesteaders. "One man," she said, "a Mr. Whitten, was awfully good looking and young. I had quite a case, really. He had a dimple in his chin, and the nicest ways. Mother Lattig was dippy about him too; and what do you think? He brought his wife—a bride, I'm sure. My luck."

I suggested that we call on them and see how they fared. Susie swept her arm in a gesture to the east. "They're off that way somewhere. I would have gone to see them long ago, but I could not leave father. He went by yesterday, early, with a load of lumber. They are going to build. Oh, but we're getting classy in Tenttown! When will you build your wonderful stone house? I bet you never do!"

I had broken through the sagebrush, following a rough road on the way to the new homesteader's. We would see Mother Lattig later. The car twisted and bumped about, but Susie was happy and chattered ceaselessly. Suddenly she caught my arm. "There's his wagon!—and his team!—what could have happened?"

She stood up in the car, resting her hand on my shoulder as she craned her neck to see. One gets desert eyes living in the desert, and recognizes objects at a long distance. "It is his wagon," she

repeated excitedly, clutching at my shoulder. "What could have happened? It's a good ten miles to his ranch. What could have happened?"

"Susie, sit down," I urged. "He is probably resting. Sit down." A shiver of dread went over me. I speeded up the car and we bumped and pitched along over the rough new road till we were up with the wagon. I sprang out and Susie quickly followed me. We found him lying in the road, face downward. I put my hand over his heart. It was beating. I turned him over. He groaned and opened his eyes, then quickly closed them.

"Oh, boys," he said, "I didn't know minutes could be so long." Susie in her close wrapped braids and tight little khaki cap looked like a boy. I tried to lift him, but he cried out in an agony of pain. The injury seemed internal.

"I was cramped and tired," he gasped out. "I got down to walk; I whipped up the leaders and the brake block struck me and knocked me down; the wagon went over me; the team stopped—they haven't moved since—but the wagon went over me."

It had happened the evening before and he had lain there all night. There was nothing to take travelers along that road. We got a plank from his load of lumber and together Susie and I edged

it inch by inch under him. Then we bound him firmly to it with my coat and Susie's sweater. We lifted the plank across the back seat of the car and Susie held him while I drove. We reached the little homesteading tent an hour later. The young wife ran out to meet us, her eyes big with fright and the terror of the long wait alone. As she came nearer horror swept her face. She was a slight young thing in a wilted calico wrapper, a timid, startled-eyed woman.

"He's a little hurt," Susie called, bravely, "but we will soon have a doctor. Isn't it lucky we have the car?" She tried to speak easily, but Susie had been through too much for her years. Her voice broke.

The poor young wife with her hands clamped to her mouth as though she would shut off her outcry, and her wide, fawn eyes looking more startled than ever, waited as we lifted down the plank and carried him into the tent. She followed, her thin shoulders bowed, stepping like a blind person, all unseeing.

We placed the plank on the bed; we began to untie the coat and sweater.

"It's no use, boys," he said, his eyes again closed. "I'm done for. The hurt's inside. Gracie, Gracie, darling, stay by the ranch; don't go back to town; stay by the ranch — for — for his sake; stay by the

ranch." His hand fumbled for hers blindly. She knelt by the bed and threw her arms about him.

"Gracie, darling—stay—stay by the ranch—for—for—" His eyes closed. My hand was on his heart. It had stopped. Still she did not know. She said, "He's asleep." Susie turned away, her eyes too full of tears for control. "Oh, Billy, Billy!" she sobbed.

"He's asleep," repeated the stunned little wife. I drew her away from the lifeless body still on its board; it was to know no other bed now—only a board; something in her drawn face suggested the meaning in the poor young husband's words. I pushed her into a home-made camp chair. The young husband had made it, an inefficient chair constructed of boards and a swinging breadth of blue denim. She was still dazed. Susie knelt beside her and took both her hands; they were thin little hands like bird claws.

I turned back to the bed to do what I could; I wished for Lizbeth.

"Don't—don't wake him," said the dazed little wife, starting up.

Susie's tears came in spite of her superb effort at control. And the tears some way told the little woman what nothing else had told her. She sat suddenly erect in the clumsy denim chair. One corner

had come untacked—it had not been a very good job. She sat up, startled. “Tell me,” she cried, “tell me the truth!” Then she sprang up and ran to him; one long, searching look and she crumpled to the ground. We did what we could.

I left Susie holding her in her arms and drove rapidly for Mother Lattig. Mother Lattig was volubly glad to see me before I could explain. Her son had gone away again for supplies and she was alone. She seemed to be breaking, poor Mother Lattig. She cried and laughed over me. As soon as I could I got her to understand what had happened.

“Ah, God,” she cried, throwing her apron to her eyes. “Now I tink it be me; now it had to be dat fine young man. It better be me; Ah, God!”

Her big arms became mother arms to the little widow.

I sent one of the Valley men to look after the team and its load, then drove back to the Q Ranch; but I returned to Happy Valley as rapidly as the car could travel with Mr. Regan. His face had gone ashen at the news. “A fearful price!” he had said under his breath. “A fearful price!”

We buried Whitten on his ranch the next day. Everyone in the valley was there. Our old man read the funeral service and led in singing “Lead,

Kindly Light." His daughters were able to sing with him; the others tried; the Dutchman sat morose and sullen all through the simple service. When we had shoveled in the earth Ed brought a board which he had sawed from the lumber that was to have built the new little cabin, and I cut in his name and age: "James Whitten, aged 22." We drove the board into the earth.

Mr. Regan was talking with the weak little widow. He had been talking with her at intervals all day. She had been unable to respond to anything he had to say. Now as the ranchers stood about, silent or in desultory conversation, I saw Mr. Regan go to the tent, holding her by the arm. He pushed back the flap and followed her in. A few minutes later he came out and called me.

"Bring the car, Billy," he said. "We're taking Mrs. Whitten home with us."

I knew that we had our new assistant. My search was ended.

CHAPTER XVIII

"WORRYING WRONG"

THERE'S something wrong with the Dutchman," Mr. Regan said to me a few days after the funeral. "Did you notice that he is worrying wrong?"

I suggested that I hadn't known there was a right way to worry; and the fact that his wheat crop did not bring him the price of hauling it out—he was two hundred and twenty-five miles from a railroad and the haul had cost him a cent a bushel for each mile—was enough to make any man worry in all the ways there were.

"A right way, maybe, isn't really worry," he said. "It's just being intent on getting out. A wrong way is to sit down in your trouble and let it close in on you. The Dutchman has sat down."

"He's had it hard—the fire and all."

"I remember once I'd got in so deep there didn't seem any way out. I was riding along thinking about it—worrying wrong like the Dutchman—and it just sort of came to me that I had to go on out as I'd come in. I couldn't back track. I'd make

more debts and go on out as I'd come in. A man's got to. I loaded down heavier and plowed on through. Debts are ballast sometimes. Even a car has to be loaded to ride easy. An empty car just bobbles along. For steady, strong going it's got to be loaded."

"Poor old Dutchie had a hard whack," I persisted; "then there's all those children. He'd promised Leeda she could go away to school."

His face lighted up. "Yes, all those children. He's raised a fine family; he's got a fine wife." And after a few minutes, "He's looked at the same thing too long; he's got to get his eyes riveted on something else."

I was not surprised when he told me later of his intention to begin the new road over Wind Mountain into Happy Valley. The present road was not only steep but narrow and rutty. Neither was I surprised when he added, "I think Dutchie'll take that contract. You can drive down there today and see Dutchie about taking the contract."

It was on this trip that our old man opened his heart to me. Susie was over at her sister's helping with one of the children who had burned his hand.

"They've got to have their mail," he said, bob-

bing his head energetically. His face was thin, the bones sharply evident under the red parchment skin. The old man was failing. I wondered if I ought not suggest this to Mrs. Clark. She would want to be with him if she knew. Her sacrifice in staying on at the cookhouse was a real one. Her whole life was bound up in her husband and children. She had never thought of wanting anything beyond the daily comradeship of those she loved. I could see that while she stayed by the job like a stoic it was wearing on her; and here was the old man, failing. I hardly heard his suggestion, so busy was I with my thoughts.

"It ain't right; they gotta have their mail," he reiterated.

"Who?" I asked absently.

"The settlers—specially the women folks. It's hard just gettin' mail once a month or so as it happens. Now if we had mail once a week those women whose husbands are away workin' wouldn't feel so down in the mouth. They'd hear; and that'd help; that and the papers'd break the monotony somethin' great."

"Well, what is the idea? How do you go about it?" I asked.

"A petition's the first thing; circulate a petition."

"Then start your petition," I said, "and I'll pick up names as I go back."

He caught at the idea and hobbled over to the table, pushed back bread and dishes, and went to work on his petition. I carried it away with me. Mr. Regan seconded our old man's plan and the petition with one hundred signatures went to Washington. In due time our old man was appointed postmaster, then bids were called for to carry the mail. It would have to be carried from Two Forks. Clark put in his bid and I think Sol Sneed and the Book-farmer, whose funds were getting low, also put in a bid each. All were rejected. They were too high.

We found our old man pretty low over it. I had driven Mr. Regan down to see how the Wind Mountain road was coming on and then we had continued on a round-up of the valley. "Uncle Sam don't somehow realize what one hundred miles and a mountain mean," he said, apologetic for Uncle Sam. "I figured just exactly what I could do it for and come out even. Didn't figure to make none; the folks has gotta have their mail; I didn't figure to make—Uncle Sam don't understand."

"Bid again, Clark, and cut off something," advised Regan.

He laughed a weak imitation of his old-time

hearty chuckle, and slapped his leg. "I would—if I had 'tother one," he said wryly. "I'd risk losin' if I had t'other one. The folks has gotta have their mail; leastwise, the women folks; they have to have things like that."

"They have; bid again, Clark, bid again. I'll piece it out; bid again."

Our old man looked up at Regan, then he put out his hand. "You sure air a public-spirited man, Regan, you sure air." A slow, happy smile overspread his thin, wasted face. "The women'll have their letters," he said, almost like a prayer. "The women have to have things like that—letters and things."

Susie pulled back the tent flap and came running down the steps. She nodded to Mr. Regan, then turned brightly to me. "How is the teacher with the pretty blue eyes?" she demanded.

"Just as pretty as ever," I answered.

"Not any prettier?"

"Not a bit."

"Oh, then that is all right. Who is Raz's now? Lizbeth?"

"No, Lizbeth is decidedly not Raz's." We went outside, leaving the two men to talk over post-office plans.

"Oh, who's then?"

"Who are you most interested in, Lizbeth or Raz?"

"Can't I be interested in both?"

"No, just one."

"Is the pretty teacher Raz's now?"

"Are you so interested in who is Raz's?"

"I am interested in who is Lizbeth's — specially."

She shot me a suspicious look.

"Sure it's not Raz you're interested in — specially?"

"Well, Raz is awfully good looking and he has the loveliest hair!"

"And mine—" I tried to turn it off lightly, but it did cut.

"Oh, Billy, dear, you know I love your hair," she exclaimed impulsively, changing from her bantering mood. "Now tell me!" she coaxed.

"Well, Lizbeth is not Raz's, and the pink and white teacher is not Raz's."

"You—you mean thing! Then you've got them both!"

"You forget Bullpit."

"Does he still stick around?"

"He took the pink-and-white teacher to a dance at Two Forks."

"And not Lizbeth?"

"And not Lizbeth."

"And you didn't take Lizbeth?"

"No."

"And Raz didn't take—Billy, there's someone else! Who is it? Tell me!"

"I think it's her uncle," I answered.

"And he won't let Lizbeth go with you—because—because—you're his—chauffeur—? Oh, Billy, I don't believe that! Besides, you're not just a chauffeur; you know you're not!"

"I didn't say that was the reason, Susie."

"Besides, you are just as good as her any day; she's a trained nurse, and you're a—a trained chauffeur; and that's as big as to be a trained nurse any day!" Her eyes were snapping. My poor little hired girl—she had many inequalities to figure out all alone in her desert of sage. Some way she always had me on a pedestal above everyone else; I don't know why.

"Who did Raz take?" She was back at it.

"Raz didn't go."

She was mystified. "Who did he stay with?"

"Susie, Susie, what a cross-questioner! You should be a lawyer."

"Did he stay with Lizbeth?"

"He did not."

"Then you must have."

"Lizbeth and I played cribbage till all of nine

o'clock, when Uncle John suggested that it was bedtime."

"What did Raz do?"

"Well, I guess he played cribbage, too," I admitted.

"Who with?"

"It might have been your mother. Raz must think a lot of your mother, the way he hangs about the cookhouse."

"Of course he loves mother; who don't? But—oh, oh, oh, I know, I know, I know. And is it really so?"

"It begins to look so."

"But—with the pretty pink-and-white teacher there, and Lizbeth, and—and—"

"And all the other girls in the whole country crazy about the big buckaroo boss, and the little widow pulls him down. Well, what inference?"

Susie sat down on a nail keg better to take it in.

"She's not—even—pretty."

"But she's got a sad, wistful way."

"She's no worker, mother says; can't do anything right; they just carry her along because they are sorry for her."

"Her hands are so helpless; they cling."

"And she is sickly—and pale—and hollow-eyed."

"And little; she would haunt a man, a big, strong man like Raz Poole. He'd wonder nights, when the wind blew, if she were afraid."

Susie heaved a prodigious sigh and looked down at her own round, muscular arms, her well-developed calves outlined beneath her short khaki skirt. "I guess I'll reduce," she said.

"Oh, so you did have your cap set for Raz, after all!"

"Well, if that is the only way to win a man!" she flung back.

"We were talking about Raz."

Her face relaxed into a speculative smile. "You don't really think she is attractive, then?"

"Health is the most attractive thing to me," I said; "health and wholesomeness and capability. I wouldn't exchange one hair of your head—"

A baby cried in the tent across the way and Jim's wife called sharply to Susie. The baby was fretting and she was worn out with him. Susie sprang up and ran away, but she looked back and I



Raz Poole

caught a twinkle in the star eyes of my little hired girl. I pulled myself up sharply. What was I thinking about?

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT RED TAPE DOES

I HAD spoken of Bullpit's activity in the locating business.

"Whenever you see one of those little fellows that a rule put across his head catches both shoulders, he'll make money. Yes, that man will make money."

Regan spoke with his usual gentleness, but with a certain tone of finality so far as Bullpit was concerned. He was not a subject to be discussed seriously or intimately. I dropped him. We were driving along the route of the irrigation canal and had just passed a huge pile of juniper wood which we Happy Valley homesteaders had chopped the winter before and for using which Mr. Regan had been indicted. A lone man, small, and tight-clothed in khaki, was monotonously patrolling it. It was laughable. Here were one hundred and fifty thousand acres of land in one piece without a soul on it save the Regan outfit, and beyond that other millions of acres with only an occasional homesteader, and

yet a government official was kept there to patrol the woodpile.

"Why?" I asked.

"Someone might steal it," Regan answered mildly, with his throaty chuckle.

"Who?" I wanted to know.

"Well, you see that man had to have a job. He's a relative of some political influence or other who had either done something bad or had a weak lung, so they sent him out to be king of the West. The West's all bad and the East's got to govern it." His Irish blue eyes twinkled. It nettled me.

"It's a pretty serious joke for the homesteaders," I said—"the people to whom the government has offered free land to get it settled."

"The government's just a man, Billy; ever think of that? And when it's a back-East man it's bound to be pretty serious. You maybe never could have pictured all this back there," his nod indicated the vast reach of unbroken country, "neither can they. The whole Northwest was saved to Uncle Sam through the vision and determination of one man. Everything has to be done by one man, Billy; someone who has the vision must make those who have the power see it. The vision and the power don't often hitch up together in the same one."

A white-coated prairie schooner pulled into view,

creeping south. Regan's eyes grew serious. "Those are the real martyrs, Billy, the pioneers. They've got to wear out their first energy all for nothing."

"You think they won't be able to make it?"

"Billy, how will they get their crops out without a railroad? Unless they're bringing in money how will they live till we do get a railroad? You've seen abandoned cabins all over the inland empire—every one a monument to the death of an American citizen's highest hope, his hope of a home and independence. You must know a man has the appetite for land pretty keen when he will haul supplies this way from a railroad to satisfy it; but the country gets him. He eats up his savings and then he has to go away and find work and the work just keeps his family on the ranch and there he is on a treadmill. The ranch can't produce without his labor is put on it, and when he puts his labor on it he can't market his crop—and there you are."

"But," I protested, "the first pioneers who crossed the Rockies made it all right."

"There were no restrictions in those days, Billy. A man took down his shotgun and brought in a deer or a brace of ducks. He hitched up his team and hauled in wood from the hills. He built a mill and used the water power. There was no question as to the right of the early pioneer to use everything

in the country, all its resources, to get his start. Now government says take the land, but touch the blood of the land — its game and wood and water — under penalty.

“Mother Nature fixed up the country all right, but the government makes a livelihood impossible. It sends its little snipper-snapper agents over the West to peek into the homesteader’s cabin and see if the poor little wife is being punished enough for her husband’s notion of making her a home; to see that she’s staying there in the desolation while he’s away somewhere earning her food; just little policemen punishing women and children. Why, Billy, they ought by rights to be guardians for Uncle Sam’s pioneers, calling to see that they are not suffering, to see if Uncle Sam can do anything in reason to make their lot easier.”

I began to feel downhearted. Were we all in a fool’s paradise? Was our effort a wild goose chase? Was our old man a mere visionary? I thought of my butte, my spring, my vision of wheat fields and cattle and a home in that forever land where one breathed in new life continually. Had I been a fool to imagine I could make the thing stick? Was this the end of my long day of hooky from the depression of artificial life?

He read my mood. “We’re all in belly deep,

Billy. You know when one of Dave's horses gets in the tule marsh belly deep he's got to swim to get out. If he stops a minute down he'll go. But a good horse—one worth caring about—he'll swim out."

"If one only knew what to do," I said. "And they stopped your canal, Uncle Sam stopped your canal—a thing that gave work to his homesteaders, that would have invited colonies and a railroad. The government stopped it!" The full import of the thing flooded me afresh.

"Just a man, Billy," he said, mildly, "a little special agent that had to make a report—he did it. I was climbing down off the dredger into the mud when the United States marshal served the papers on me. He didn't like the mud, I remember. When inferiors govern superiors power must always be used, Billy. He had the whole machinery of government with him, the marshal, the district attorney, the courts. It was some feather in his cap.

"Makes me think of a cub reporter I met in New York once just after one of those big liners had gone down, carrying a thousand people. The cub reporter got the first news to his paper and the scoop gave him a promotion and two weeks' vacation. Some one spoke of the awfulness of the disaster. 'But look what it did for me!' he said, beat-

ing his little breast. Well, see what a big thing it was for a little special agent. Found a man digging a canal through a tule swamp and using the government's juniper wood to run the dredger. Stopped the canal, stopped the coming of a thousand settlers, stopped the bread and butter from the homesteaders' mouths—but look what it did for him! He caught a big fish, made a sensational report." He chuckled.

"When the little policeman came to patrol the woodpile," he went on in an amused tone, "he had been riding all day without a mouthful to eat. He didn't know what he was getting into when he left the railroad at Ossing. He stopped, all caved in, at a homesteader's cabin and asked for dinner. The homesteader's wife had been pretty hard hit and that little khaki suit didn't look good to her. He straightened up his padded shoulders and said right spirited for one so all caved in, 'I'm in the employ of the Secretary of the Interior and I want some dinner.' 'Well,' she says, 'if you were the Secretary of the Interior himself I couldn't cook you no dinner. I haven't got any wood to cook you a dinner.' It was a right handy answer, wasn't it?"

We had reached the dredger. It lay there in the soft mud, sinking steadily into the swamp, the water pouring in over it, its machinery rusting, its

cogs glued together with mire. To organize a camp and solve the problem of putting a ditch through a tule swamp had meant months of hard work. As with everything in this virgin country, there was no precedent. Every trick of the soil and the stream had to be learned at first hand. It had been a terrific undertaking and the initial expense had been enormous; and there lay the dredger sinking down in the mud and water; and there lay the juniper wood idle and unused; and there were the homesteaders, frantic for work that would make it possible for them to fulfil Uncle Sam's requirements—while Uncle Sam's money—the money of all the people—paid a policeman to patrol a woodpile! There was no one to steal it, no one to buy it, no one to use it. It was as safe from interference as though every stick stood on its stump back in the hills. And back in the interminable Oregon forests was being conserved more juniper that was dying and falling and rotting from old age; falling and making underbrush that had to be guarded from fire by other government employed men—other people paid by all the people's money.

“The Indians had a better way,” Mr. Regan said, dropping into my thoughts. “The Indians kept the underbrush and dead timber cleaned out for the sake of the game. It prevented fires as well. Our

timber today is in constant danger from the rank undergrowth and dead, fallen trees. It needs to be cleaned out to protect the woods. We owe our big timber to the Indians."

"How could they get the law on you, Mr. Regan?" I demanded. "It seems to me preposterous—I started to be a lawyer—I read for a while—how did they do it?"

"It's an old law, Billy," he said, "enacted back in eighteen thirty-two when the Government didn't see any farther than that they would always need red cedar and oak for building battleships. The law says it's a criminal offense to use oak or red cedar off the government reserve except for the United States navy."

"But juniper—"

"Juniper never had any classification. It had no value. It just went along with the cedar."

"Then what in the name—"

"Billy, you're on the spot. You're seeing the thing as it is. The men who are dealing with this case are not seeing it at all—just reading a report."

"Then what is the plan?" I demanded, feeling suddenly a fighter. "What is the thing to do?"

"We've got to have a railroad," he began in his mildly persuasive tone, "but a railroad won't come without settlers; the settlers can't come without a

railroad; there you have the deadlock. Of course if that timber belt to the east was open, a railroad would build to timber; but that is shut off from use by the government; if the waterways were open we could have mills, but the water power is tied up by the government; if a canal was dug here, inviting a thousand settlers to irrigated ranches, a railroad might build to that; it would be a feeder; but you can't dig a canal without wood and the wood belongs to the government."

"Then what are we to do?"

"Find a way, Billy, find a way."

"And in the meantime all those homesteaders down in Happy Valley and the new ones coming in this spring, what are they facing but — starvation?"

"If they will hold on, Billy, they'll have a good thing of it some day; if they'll just hold on."

I burst out, "In the name of God, hold on to what?" I was thinking of the plucky Clark women, and poor little Susie's eyes that seemed never to be able to twinkle steadily again, and her father, crippled for life, all in one year; they had held on to their doom; and now others were coming in and he was saying they must hold on!

"Of course, there are men whose nature it is to give up," he said, "and others that get back of a

thing like a mule. Generally we've had the ones who give up. All the little empty cabins tell us that. I've hoped for the others. I've hoped—and Clark's one."

I felt ashamed. "I'm another," I said, putting out my hand. He grasped it firmly and some way in that hand grasp the country got onto my shoulders. The sun set on my mere day of hooky, and rose on a day of fight. After I went to bed that night John Regan with his gentle voice and his outward mildness came before me as a man of iron.

CHAPTER XX

LIZBETH AND CONFIDENCES

WE had a talk about marriage one day, Mr. Regan and I. It followed a comment of his that only married settlers, as a rule, stuck it out. "No," I said, "I shall never marry."

He laughed; and then he laughed again; he had a most disconcerting way of laughing at times. I didn't laugh. "Young folks," he said at last, "are all alike, all ready to say, solemn, what they won't do with the big stream of their lives; and they just at the starting of it."

"I have a very good reason," I maintained.

"I remember thinking that way, too, along about twenty-five years ago; had an awful good reason; but just the same, Billy, there ain't a thing a man can do as nice for himself or as good for his country as to marry a fine woman and raise up a good big family."

"I can't think what reason you could have had," I replied. With his many interests and his ceaseless activity, he still seemed to me a lonely man.

"All the early cattlemen were bachelors," he

answered. "All had left a girl somewhere; were making a stake and going back to where she lived to enjoy it; some of us never got back, Billy; got too tight locked into the country."

Then I spoke frankly of the family curse. "My sister was right," I said. "A man who knows what he's about isn't going to put that curse on anyone else; not a man who has suffered as I have. My grandfather the most prominent judge in his state and I—his only grandson—driving your car and grateful for the job!" I didn't often think of these things, but today, someway, sitting alongside this man of force who had made himself one of the greatest powers in his state by sheer will, it struck home bitterly.

He was silent some moments. "I don't know about that, Billy," he said. "I'm not so sure about that. It's pretty big to conquer a thing like that that's as you say been put on you. Making money or a name isn't much for a man to do compared with that. It looms pretty big, Billy."

"He might conquer it in himself and still the curse might pass on to his son."

"It might—of course it might—this thing of inheritance is out of our hands. We can't do much but watch it. Seems to me, though, that the man who conquers that thing in himself—why, he's got

the makings of a mighty fine will that will be something to pass on, too. No person is ever going to grow and handle others till he's handled the person closest to him, and that's himself. He won't be a leader till he's done that. A man who comes into life with nothing special to conquer — no one thing to fight — don't have much chance to develop fighting strength. I was always inefficient, Billy, unless I had a definite battle on, a real thing to pitch into. You've got a real thing there."

This was a new slant. I sat thinking.

"It's all very well to stay down in the country, Billy, to stay away from temptation; that's all very well and right while a man's will is a weak, sick little thing that has to be nursed; but it's pretty fine to build it up so strong you don't have to police yourself; so strong you don't have to have things kept out of your reach like crockery from babies. Just a great, big, strong will, Billy, that will carry you through. That will be doing a real thing with your life."

I thought about this for days. I was getting a different kind of hold on this thing of living. It didn't seem the same thing that it had in the old days where the fear of open disgrace was ever the idea, rather than what a man really might do with the equipment his forbears had handed him.

The school, meantime, was quite a success. The pink-and-white teacher had pretty, dainty ways and the children all liked her. Lizbeth helped with the children and in the cookhouse, too. She was always slipping in to broil a piece of steak for her Uncle John or to make him a cup of coffee or do some other small personal service. Lizbeth was an orphan. Her uncle had kept her in boarding school and from there she had taken training in a hospital. She had had only her vacations with him until now. She seemed never weary of doing things for him, performing all those devoted personal services that so many men miss altogether. He had much in Lizbeth—but still his life seemed lonesome, particularly in the evening, when an open fire suggested homecomings and family gatherings.

I sat one evening thinking about it as the fire crackled cheerily and everything was quiet. He had just come in from a long trip, and Lizbeth was at his feet untying his shoes; she had brought his slippers. She loved to do all these things for him. She had a great big mother-heart, and it was expending itself on this father-hearted man. Would neither ever know a closer tie? Lizbeth was a pretty girl, especially when her large, gray eyes lighted up as they invariably did on her uncle's appearance. As I watched her, she lifted her face

to mine. My question may have been in my eyes.

Her uncle pulled his chair up to the fire where Dave Todd was waiting to talk over ranch matters. Dave began to protest against the wholesale on-slaught made by homesteaders on the haystacks. Mr. Regan had insisted on letting the settlers have hay to an extent that looked serious for the Regan cattle. Lizbeth came over to where I rested on the couch in the shadows among the coyote skins.

"You're sad—often," she accused. "I wonder why—homesick?"

"So are you—often; I wonder why?"

"You look delicate. I've wondered—but you never cough. Still that is not an infallible sign. I never cough either."

"Lizbeth," I exclaimed—"you!"

"Sh—not so loud. It would worry Uncle John. I haven't a bad case, but I inherited it. My father was tubercular in his boyhood, but he thought he was cured. It seems to have come out in me. That is why I have given up nursing and insist on staying here. Don't tell Uncle John."

"So that is the reason—" I did not finish it; but this explained Lizbeth's resigned look. Often I thought of an early saint when I saw her going about doing things for people with the serenity of a nun. And yet she was young and pretty and she

had a lot of spirit. It was the big, tragic resignation of youth.

I returned confidence for confidence—it was only fair, though I far preferred not to talk about the thing. I knew she sensed this; that she felt she had almost forced my confidence and that the subject would never again be mentioned. But the talk back in the shadows while the two determined cattlemen argued by the blaze cemented a friendship that was daily becoming more intimate and precious. I resolved to help Lizbeth win her fight. She did not get out of doors enough. I would suggest her going along in the car oftener. Lizbeth should be won out of her inheritance.

Long afterward I learned that she had made a similar resolve concerning me.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DANCE AT THE SCHOOLHOUSE

OUR old man got the mail contract and we now saw him every week. Thursday noon he would reach the cookhouse, driving his rickety buckboard, and call blithely to Mother Clark as he hobbled out. Then he would reach us again Saturday on his way back from Two Forks. He carried the letters in a shoebox and the papers in a gunny bag, both resting on the seat beside him. Little by little the buckboard began to fill up, however, with the shopping he did for the homesteaders along his route and for which he refused to make any charge. I protested against his becoming the universal shopper, but he looked at me in mild astonishment: "Why, Billy, the folks has gotta have things."

Dear old man, there was a queer quirk in his brain that kept him forever busy with the problems of those about him, that prevented his centering on his own problems. I imagine he had always made money for everyone but himself. In time the homesteaders accepted his shopping services as a matter of course, grumbling now and then when he had not

pleased them or when he was late, and few realized that these extra duties consumed time that he could hardly spare and for which he rarely received thanks. But he was satisfied.

December made considerable history.

Mr. Regan's case was postponed until April. He was under twenty thousand dollars' bonds not to leave the state, this man whose interests were so closely interwoven with his state that he had seldom left it during his fifty years save that he might push through some measure for its benefit. He had hoped to have the trial off his hands, for he wanted to go East to meet David Mill, head of a road which operated to the north of us, but which had no holdings in Oregon. The old Oregon road had disappointed Regan too many times for further faith. His hope was to interest Mill. The postponement of the trial added another five months to the wait and uncertainty; and in the meantime the dredger sank more deeply into the marsh and the rust ate at its vitals and the mud clogged its cogs and a fifty thousand-dollar investment continued in its process of disintegration.

December saw the Dutchman in a state of complete collapse; worry finally got him. Again John Regan came to the rescue, sending him to a hospital in Two Forks. The Dutchman's wife asked to be

allowed to finish the road contract. She had been working right along with her husband. Mr. Regan gave her the contract.

December saw the Book-farmer in trouble. His funds were gone and he must find work. Mr. Regan turned him over to Raz Poole. Raz swore a round, picturesque oath and growled out something about men being so thick in the bunkhouse now—half of them ridin' round the bunkhouse stove waitin' for summer—but Raz could have saved his oaths. The school was in its last week, the pink-and-white teacher was to improve her ranch—and I noticed that her eyes followed the slim, neat figure of the Book-farmer as he followed Raz to the bunkhouse. I surmised that he would get a job more to his liking—and he did.

December saw the arrival of James Whitten, Junior. Mother Clark, her face wreathed in a wonderful smile of mystery, carried him to the cookhouse for the buckaroos to peek at, poke at, or gaze at, as most of them did, in awe and wonderment; a little red, wrinkled squirm of humanity, with tight doubled fists over which the skin hung loosely and a voice that suggested disapproval—such was James. Old Sody in his perpetual following up of leppies extended his interest to little leppy James and pronounced on him as a fine specimen of a boy.

The leppy baby at once became the Q Ranch baby and everyone accepted him as a personal responsibility.

And December recorded my first trouble with my little hired girl! It came about—innocently—through Lizbeth. She had been out in the car a great deal all winter and the fresh, crisp air was giving her color. She looked less cloistered. She was generally lively and spirited unless in one of her despondent moods, and these had not possessed her so often of late. I had found that these moods could be dispelled. She did not nurse them, she tried to avoid them, and she responded gaily to every attempt I made to coax her out of them. Sometimes it was with a half-sob in her throat, but still she would bat her eyes hard and try to come out of it. Mr. Regan had got over his way of sending us all off to bed at nine o'clock; he left Lizbeth more to me. Sometimes when I had to make a trip to Two Forks he would say, "Hop in, Lizbeth, and go along," in a casual way that left me undecided whether his object was to put a check on me or to benefit Lizbeth. I think very little escaped Mr. Regan; he was too shrewd to miss anything; I believe he knew Lizbeth's secret, which she thought she kept so religiously from him, but humored her in her illusion.

The day before Christmas he suggested a drive

around Happy Valley just to see that no one was suffering. "We can't forget wells, can we, Billy?" he said with a sympathetic laugh. At the last moment, when I was ready to drive off, Lizbeth came to the door with the baby in her arms. We both realized at the same moment, I think, that Lizbeth, since the advent of young James, had stayed in too closely. The infant was now two weeks old and Lizbeth was pale.

"Get into your togs, Lizbeth, and go along," he said. "Wait—wait a minute, Billy. Lizbeth better go along."

Lizbeth protested; the baby must not get into bad habits; he must be fed regularly and made to nap, and besides Mother Clark was done out with all that work and—

"That's so," said Regan, frowning. "That's so; Mother Clark's had it all; that won't do; can't let Mother Clark be getting off her feed; she must have help; bring Susie along back," he added. "Her father can stay with one of his other girls; bring Susie back."

Lizbeth meantime had gone away with the baby; he called to her to hurry. It was a long drive and we must be off before the sun melted the snow on the mountain.

She came out wearing a white wool cap that was

pulled down snugly over her head and a long, handsome beaver coat, a Christmas present from her uncle. With her fluffy brown hair edging the cap, a faint pink flush in her cheeks, and her large, luminous gray eyes unusually lighted up over the prospect of a change, she looked remarkably pretty. She had a dainty, well-bred air that made me think of Ennis. Her uncle, seeing her, smiled appreciatively over her appearance, then telling me to wait a minute he went into the house and brought out another fur coat, a great bearskin, which he handed me; it was his Christmas present. He would listen to no thanks, but busied himself tucking us both in, even calling to old Mex in the cook house to bring a foot warmer. Everything must be snug and comfortable. Lizbeth leaned from the car and kissed the top of his head and nestled her arm around his neck in a quick, impulsive hug, and we were off.

She was in one of her rebellious moods. I liked Lizbeth in a rebellious mood. Too often she was resigned and nun-like. Lizbeth was wanting life today—life and joy and fulfillment—and she wanted things righted for her Uncle John, and she wanted them now.

“Always Uncle John is sacrificing himself and always he is being fought,” she said heatedly. “If

he were a bad man with a cruel design to do business against the human race, he couldn't be more persecuted. It makes me perfectly wild! And all the time he goes along so calmly and patiently!"

"I wonder," I said, "if his being so persecuted in trying to do good to people, and evil men being so let alone in their evil, is not rather a sad commentary on our civilization. There are so many more evil to flock to the evil than good to flock to the good."

"I don't know," she said, in no mood to generalize. "I only know that he is always thinking out big things for people; and all the detail he manages to attend to—think of his remembering the foot warmer!" She wiped her eyes, for the tears were falling fast. "If I die before—before he gets his ease in life, before his long battle is won—and a railroad gets in—oh, Billy, it's hard!"

She rarely used my name.

"Lizbeth," I said—I rarely used hers, I don't know why—"you certainly did need this trip. Your nerves are upset. Why do you talk so? You never looked less like dying."

"I don't know; I am upset; I know it; if I were my own patient I would order a complete change for a few days."

"Then order it and we will stay over night with

Mother Lattig. She is a wonder and to think you have never met her. We will drive all today and have an evening with Mother Lattig and—wait—better still—I heard they were to have a dance at Mother Lattig's tonight. They call her cabin the schoolhouse—"the bucket-of-blood schoolhouse"—"

"Why 'the bucket-of-blood schoolhouse'?"

I remembered the origin of the name. It arose from a now famous encounter with one Bullpit whose nose had been bloodied. But I couldn't tell on Bullpit; Susie never had; she had been silent about him so I evaded: "Oh, it's picturesque, I suppose. We will stay and dance and tomorrow drive all day, taking Susie along, and then—"

"What will Uncle John think?"

"We can send him word; Ed's down there now with a load of supplies; he'll take the word back."

We talked along and I told her stories of Mother Lattig. She bravely tried to respond and choked back the sob in her throat and made an effort at gayety. Finally running out of material I told her of Susie's encounter with her teacher leaving out Bullpit's name. It pleased her immensely. "What a girl she is!" Lisbeth exclaimed. "What wouldn't I give for her strength!" Her eyes filled with a look of wistful envy. I wondered if she wasn't so well. At last she confessed. There had been a

hemorrhage—a slight one, but it was the beginning. She knew the end.

And then she became gay, recklessly gay. She made me drive rapidly; she teased; she dropped into the country's queer dialect, made up from that of Germans, Swedes, and Italians, who were learning their English from buckaroos whose English in turn was highly colored with the language of the Mexican drivers. She could imitate it to perfection and it was screamingly funny. She was a feverishly excited Lizbeth. I began to fear about the dance; I suggested that after all her Uncle might worry—perhaps we had better go back.

“No,” she said with a defiant toss of her head, “I am going to dance tonight—and dance and dance and dance—you dance of course?”

“I haven't since I came West. Yes, I dance—it was in the curriculum. I began at nine, hating it. But now I'm glad.”

“You are an awfully well-brought-up person,” she said, sighing, her head to one side as she eyed me. “And I—well, any way I always had lots of everything that wasn't good for me. Girls without mothers and with indulgent Uncle Johns do.”

We found our old man alone in his tent. He was converting a kerosene can into a new chimney for

the stovepipe. The tent was cold—he had had to let the fire go out so he could work on his stovepipe. The old pipe hole had split down and he had put a patch over it, a patch cut from the legs of abandoned overalls. The tent looked forlorn and lonesome and a little despairing, as though it had kept up just as long as it could without its mother-spirit. We asked for Susie. Susie was over toward the hills inspecting her traps. She had gone horseback. He showed us a pile of skins, coyotes mostly, with a few timber wolves.

“Susie’s been right lucky,” he said, scratching his stubby chin and eyeing them speculatively, “Right lucky.”

I remembered that coyotes brought a bounty of three dollars a skin, and timber wolves fifteen. And I remembered Susie’s love for wild animals and her horror of killing them. Susie was feeling a tremendous urge to make money when she would resort to trapping. Our old man seemed to me thinner than when I saw him last. He needed his wife at home—and Susie—Susie was making money trapping; Susie, who had cried so over the trapped jack rabbits when they whined like babies and plead with bright human eyes that we had had to let them go—Susie was trapping timber wolves and coyotes.

"Let's go find her," cried Lizbeth, still in feverishly high spirits. "I want to see Susie. I want to see her traps."

Our old man pointed out the direction and we started off. Lizbeth was the talkative one now. I was sick with the sense of what Susie's trapping meant.

We came upon her as she bent over a trap. She had just shot the coyote—we heard the shot ring out and wondered about it. Her rifle lay in the snow where she had thrown it; she had not heard us; she must have been very intent. She was kneeling in the snow, bending above the animal that lay dead, its head against her lap. I stopped the car and she looked up. She got to her feet dragging up the dead coyote in her arms. She hastily drew her sleeve across her eyes. She wore blue overalls, a much-worn white felt sport hat pulled tightly over her head, and a shabby bright red sweater. I sprang out of the car and Lizbeth came tumbling after me; Lizbeth, a picture of happy prosperity in her long, luxurious fur coat, her eyes dancing with excitement, and the little silk tassel tossing gaily about her head.

"Susie," I called to her, but she drew back as we approached. Lizbeth, still feverishly excited, began prattling gaily of a thousand things. She was in that feverish mood when girls run on at random

never noticing where their shots hit. And all the time she was coming across the new fallen snow to shabby, forlorn little Susie, hugging her dead coyote to her breast, tears on her cheeks, her gun at her feet.

"How cunning you look," cried Lizbeth, leveling her camera for a snap shot. Lizbeth always carried her camera. "Susie, what a perfect boy you make!" Susie's fine, straight well-rounded young limbs were well displayed in the overalls. Her face below the felt hat was boyishly pretty—no locks ever escaped from the smooth order of her flaxen braids and bands—and her lips were like coral. Lizbeth came on and kissed her cheek, lightly. "Susie dear, I just had to see you. How cunning you look!" she repeated. I wished all at once that the handsome fur coat I was wearing was back at the Q Ranch, that I was in the habiliments of Happy Valley. We were too well dressed standing there in the new fallen snow. We appeared gay, happy, prosperous people, and there stood my poor little hired girl hugging to her breast a coyote out of which she had sent the life that she and those she loved might live—my poor little shabby hired girl, who was really by so much the richest of the three!

Susie went through the forms. Lizbeth turned her attention to the dead coyote. Susie told us she had found him with his foot broken and had shot

him at once. She hoped he had not been there long. He was still fighting so probably he had not been. She wished she could get more timber wolves for the bounty on a timber wolf was five times that of a coyote; and the timber wolves did harm; they took the young calves and pigs and chickens. The coyotes didn't do much harm. Her head went down to the coyote's head, hanging limp over her arm, and her chin caressed it.

Lizbeth wanted her to get in the car and ride around with us making calls. But Susie insisted she had other traps to visit. She had ten now and she must visit them every day, for an animal might be in distress. It made her housekeeping rather bad; she was afraid we had found the tent in sorry shape. And all the time her eyes were just quiet star eyes with never a twinkle in them, and her mouth resolute and still. I asked her to drive the car—I had taught her to drive—and let me make the rounds of the traps. I picked up her gun and began to pull off my coat.

"No," she said with firm positiveness, "I must do it. I am prepared." She lifted her foot; the shoe had been patched by her father. "My shoes are scented; yours are not."

"Then we shall see you tonight," called Lizbeth, going back to the car, for the air was sharp and cold.

"Tonight?" Susie paused; she had taken the gun from me.

"At the dance; we're staying for it. You'll be there, of course?"

"I will drive over for you," I said, getting in the car.

"Never mind," she called back, "Father will take me. Father would be disappointed not to take me in—in—the buckboard."

We drove on toward other homesteaders' tents, but I could not throw off my own bad mood. "It is all my fault!" I explained to Lizbeth about the square knot that I had not known how to tie, and Susie trapping to make money so her mother could come home very likely. I told her how Susie hated to see anything killed.

"Isn't the world just one great big problem?" Lizbeth swallowed a sob, "but any way, tonight we'll dance; let me be gay, Billy, and—and dance!"

It wasn't fair to Lizbeth. I cheered up and kept the talk in lively channels.

Mother Lattig wept and laughed over us: "Lord, I just am surprised," she kept repeating in her deep throaty voice that always put so much feeling into her words. Lizbeth was charmed with her, also with her soup, also to see Tom again. Tom was a good-looking fellow and spoke good English. He

had big, black eyes and sooty black hair, and pale-olive skin with red lips, and the whitest large sound teeth. To me the finest thing about him was his appearance of perfect health. He was as sound as a Baldwin apple. Lizbeth insisted he had a poetic strain that was very appealing, but I still think it was his physique.

The schoolhouse which now served for social purposes in the valley, was in a state of preparation for the dance. The furniture such as it was had been moved out, the benches placed against the wall, and the teacher's desk turned into a banquet table. Every one was to bring something; there would be a big feed. Mother Lattig was tremendously excited over her spiced cakes and cookies. Also she had made a great pot of her famous soup; she said it would come in right handy after the long ride. Many were coming from thirty miles away. Tom had borrowed Susie's phonograph for the music. We went over the records for dance music trying to find some that were not scratched.

"It's more fun than a barrel of monkeys," Lizbeth whispered, squeezing my hand as she put on a record. "No wonder you like homesteading."

Lizbeth's mood kept up; and when the guests began to arrive her hilarity increased. Lizbeth was not laughing at these people; they were her uncle's

people, of his country, and she was too much at heart in sympathy with their hardships to smile over their pitiful social attempts. I think she could have cried more easily; I think she laughed to keep from crying



Leeda

sometimes. There was the Dane's wife, as lean as ever, yanking along a little girl by each hand; she had made a pathetic effort to dress them up for the party; and there was Sol Sneed drawing his sleeve at intervals across his eye that would water; there

were Susie's sisters, neat and brown and wholesome in dresses brought from town two years earlier; and a row of little Dutch girls, all smaller copies of Leeda who was more timid than ever, and more quaintly dressed. Susie came late with her father—Susie, in an immaculate white blouse and a much-mended blue serge skirt, looking like a high-school girl fresh for a ball game, but with something gone from the

little romping schoolgirl who had come into the valley, something besides ribbons.

Lizbeth was a beautiful dancer; also she knew the newer steps, and soon we were trying them together. The rest sat down to watch us. When we finished dancing they clapped vigorously, and Lizbeth, all aflush and happy, her eyes shining, dragged me to the floor again. I thought it was not good for her, but she whispered: "Forget what is good for me; let me be happy — tonight."

I went to Susie for the next dance, but she had it with Tom Lattig. After that Lizbeth and I had several dances in succession. She wanted the newer dances of play and jollity, and the others did not know them. We went out on to the porch and danced out there alone, feeling that we must not interfere with the others' pleasure, for invariably when we started a different dance they stopped and watched us. We were not of them, we were apart. I over-heard one of the newer homesteaders whisper to another, "Stuck up's!"

And all the time it was to Lizbeth as a last wild fling at youth and happiness. It was a pitifully tragic night had they only known, they who envied Lizbeth.

By midnight they had forgotten that we were stuck-up's. They were dancing with too much abandon to think about us. Tom invited Lizbeth

but the other men were shy about asking her ; I saw that she didn't lose a dance. Whenever Tom danced with Lizbeth I tried to get Susie for a partner ; but Susie was not her old self — she seemed still seeing the pleading eyes of a wounded coyote which begged her not to shoot.

Mother Lattig announced supper and every one found places about the benches — that is every one who was not helping to serve. All were in fine spirits now ; even the Dane's wife's eyes were alight with something like pleasure, and Sol Sneed sniffed hungrily and rubbed his eye every minute. It seemed to water at sight of food. Some one, while waiting to be served, stepped idly to the phonograph and put on a record. It chanced to be that only unscratched one of the old days :

*Some one to love and cheer you
Sometimes when things go wrong ;
Some one to snuggle near you,
Some one to share your song.
Some one to call you sweetheart
After the day is done—*

At this point Susie came in bearing a tray of spiced cookies. She stopped in the doorway, then quickly put down her tray and stepping up to the phonograph, took off the record, broke it across her knee, and flung the pieces out into the snow. I looked

strangely at my little hired girl—it had been our song!

I went out and got the car. When I came in every one was drinking soup; you would have known they were drinking soup without coming in. It was very good soup. Lizbeth was also having a cup of it with Tom. I went over to her.

“I am going to take you home.”

“But—Billy! We’re having such a good time and they will dance till daylight, Tom tells me!”

“It is moonlight and I can make it in two hours. We didn’t send word to Mr. Regan—he will be alarmed.”

She got up reluctantly. “Poor Uncle John; and it’s Christmas eve for him, too—and he’s all alone. Yes, let us go by all means.”

Her recklessness was gone; her short day of abandon to mere youth gone, too, as swiftly as it had come; but the results of that day were to go with us down the years.

CHAPTER XXII

DARK HOURS

“**W**HEN everybody else is sick, be well!” I had told John Regan all that was in my mind. I must leave the country; I must get to town somewhere, somehow, and get a start at something that would make money. Our old man was failing, Mother Clark was eating her heart out over the long absence from her family—at sixty eating her heart out with home sickness; Susie—Susie was killing wild animals and carrying their haunting eyes in her memory to grieve over; poor little Susie trying bravely to help.

It was useless for them to struggle on. They must get out. The country was locked up tighter than a drum. The railroad was not building in—was no nearer building in than it had been for thirty years. Jim was discouraged now as well as Ed; the Book-farmer was broke; the Dutchman's girls were working on the road like men. Only the foreigners could stand it; the Dane was getting his ranch improved; the Lattigs were making things go. Foreigners could stand to eat potatoes and beans.

three times a day; they could stand to work like galley slaves, the women along with the men. But it was too much to ask of American families. The pioneering would have to be done by foreigners; it was too hard for our people.

I must get away. I had some money coming to me, and I must get away; I would work as I had never worked before. I would get a start and help the old man, help make up for the injury I had caused him. I had been a curse to every one who had ever befriended me. I brought only misfortune into people's lives. It had had to be my fate to bring this crowning disaster of disablement on our old man; I must do something.

We were driving along in the car to Two Forks. Lizbeth was in bed with a severe sore throat—and I felt guilty for that, too; I should not have let her dance on the porch.

He let me talk it all out; and then it was he turned to me almost sadly, and said: "Billy, when every one else is sick, be well." I had nothing to say.

"You talk of giving the country over to foreigners: you mean give it over to ignorance, to people who don't know any better—to people you've no conscience about killing off. You've got the universal point of view: Here we take so much pride in our

cities in building up our public-school system, in educating boys and girls to ideals of luxury and convenience, to modern equipment, to wholesome food, bath tubs and machine conveniences—and then we turn them onto a proposition like this. Billy, this is our country; it's for our boys and girls; we've got to make it fit for them—for the kind of product our own civilization is turning out."

"And in the meantime let the country grind the very life out of people who are—worth too much. It isn't fair!"

He said nothing.

"A man can't so much as shoot a wild duck to keep his family from starving," I went on. "He can't bring in a deer from the hills. He can't cut a stick of wood. He can't force a railroad. He can only sit back and wait—thirty years—another thirty—for some one man with the legal authority to decide whether or not the country shall be opened up. God!"

"That's it, Billy; that's it; that's what's got to be changed."

"And in the slow march of time while these things are being changed by men in the East who don't know a damn thing about them and never were hungry or cold or lonely or in danger in their lives, let the Clarks die off—the Clarks and others like

them—the real citizens who would do something for the country if they had a chance.”

“You’re saying it well, Billy; you’ve got it all learned right out of life which is the only way to learn anything. Everything else is just hearsay. I think I said all these things to you a while back and they were just words then; you see you had to get it into your veins—live it—to really know. They’re just words to those men back East, too. That’s knowledge, Billy; real knowledge which is just the difference between what you learn out of books and what you know from life.”

“If the case goes against you,” I went on, “and you are not permitted to finish the canal—”

“That ain’t the way to figure, Billy.”

“And in the meantime—”

“Nothing hurts anyone, Billy,” he said with great patience, “but what they miss. Don’t go robbing these people of their chance to do a real thing with their lives. Suppose they all pull out and go to town: suppose they get jobs that keep them comfortably housed and fed—what will their lives have stood for? Leave that roped-off-between-banisters life for men without vision, Billy. There’s plenty of them, Lord knows. It’s a big thing to unlock a country. In all America there isn’t another situation like this one. It’s a big thing to be the ones that

unlock it for Americans. Why rob them of doing this big thing?"

"Mother Clark must go home." I fell back on the original problem.

"I've been thinking that too; and get Ed's wife up here."

"Ed's wife isn't strong on cooking," I said. "Ed is a great cook; once worked in a bakery."

"Ed? Can he cook? Now isn't that fine! Ed isn't strong on wrangling cattle, Raz says, and we don't need him. Put him in the cookhouse with his wife helping. The school children go home in a day or so. Let Ed and his wife run the cookhouse."

Even this let-down helped.

"I'm hoping to bring David Mill in here, Billy, as soon as the weather breaks. I'd have had him before but the indictment won't let me leave the state to go after him. He is scheduled to make a trip to the coast in his private car this spring and I plan to go out and fetch him in to see the country. You're right—we've got to have a railroad—and have it quick. Merriman has fooled us with his surveys and promises just about long enough. We've got to get Mill interested—it's the only way.

"By the way, Billy, when Mrs. Whitten is strong enough I want to send her down to stay on her ranch for awhile. She must prove up; it would be

a shame for her to lose it; when that boy of hers comes of age there won't be any government land. I wish in a few days you would go down that way and see that everything is comfortable. Get some of the Happy Valley people to help put up her cabin. The neighbors must take hold and help—it's good for them. Maybe you can get the Book-farmer to do a little clearing and plowing for her."

"I think," I said, smiling, "the Book-farmer will not be popular with Raz as a hired man for the little widow."

"You think not, Billy? Well, Raz'd better be looking after that ranch of hers then; but you go down for awhile any way, Billy. Wouldn't you like to go down for awhile?"

I was at work on the widow's ranch before I realized the design in this. How we were all managed by him! He had wanted to divert my attention from going to town, once more get me linked in with the soil and the future of the country. I spent a few days on my own ranch, and drank deeply of the spring water and planned my stone house and my rabbit wire and my first crop; and then I rode over to see my desert claim; it lay as I had left it, sheltered and beautiful in its snow-mantled hills. I had got an extension of time, but the well must be finished that spring.

CHAPTER XXIII

WAITING FOR SPRING

WHILE the plowing and sowing and fencing and straining and starving and building on the future went on among the homesteaders of Happy Valley, the atmosphere of the past clung tenaciously to the buckaroo outfit at the Q Ranch and similar outfits at the other big cattle ranches. The sombreroed buckaroos and soft-voiced Mexican drivers were all but oblivious to the passing of the open range and the coming of the cultivated farm.

A wholly new people would have to tame the land: these oldtime cattle drivers could never become tillers of the soil. Governed only by the buckaroo boss, the buckaroo is a prince of the range, a son of the royal house of cattle. He will spend his life running cattle and when there are no more cattle to run in our country he will become a pensioner of his cattle king or move on to Australia or Mexico where there is still open range. He will never work with his hands or tramp over ground on his feet.

And so as the winter weather began to break up he again rode the range in happy unconcern of the

new life building up about him; he smoked his endless cigarettes, he talked horse and dreamed horse and spent his salary on gay trappings, for his whole world lay open to a sunny sky and the whole business of his life was to find deep grass and sweet water for a bunch of cattle. The future? Would it not be like today—and yesterday? Would there not always be a bunch of cattle to get into the hills, a cigarette to roll, a song to sing, the open range, and when the day ended the grub wagon and a pair of blankets?

Often in our long drives John Regan and I would pass a buckaroo sitting a-hunch on his horse and smiling amusedly as he watched with careless indifference a prairie schooner dragging its way into the country. The schooner would be leaking plows, spades, hoes, women, and children. Sometimes he would appear to be sympathetic; there was no question with him as to what would happen—or what ought to happen for that matter. The country would get them all right. He had no doubt of the continual defeat of would-be settlers, the continued reign of the cattle men. He was sorry for them, but how could they be such durn fools, “disturbin’ the soil that the Lord A’mighty put grass on for cattle.”

At the Q Ranch old Sody went solemnly about intent on his many leppies; and the little leppy baby

learned to suck his thumb and smile all over his funny, boy face, and didn't know in the least that he lived amidst tragedies; and the leppy baby's mother continued helpless and inefficient, only knowing to croon to her baby and look up with startled fawn eyes that now smiled when the big buckaroo boss came near; and the pink-and-white teacher—who spent much time with Lizbeth—laughed more than ever and her eyes shone more brightly; and the Book-farmer, who was clearing her ranch, seemed less bookish but just as one-ideaed—only the idea was a different one now; and Bullpit dropped in on us occasionally for over night, always jaunty, throwing out his calves and feeling very sure of himself with open attentions to Lizbeth; Lizbeth amused herself with him, goodnaturedly non-critical. Everything was temporary with Lizbeth—she made no plans, living altogether as one without a future.

I plead with her at times to talk frankly with her uncle about her health. No doubt there were things to do if one only knew what they were. She was very pale but for two bright spots that glowed in her cheeks almost constantly now, signalling disaster.

“With all that's on his mind,” she would come back, “the trial in April, the effort he is making to interest the Mill people, his perplexities over the

homesteaders, and the stock market lower than it has been in years and interest higher—no, no Billy, I won't become an additional expense. I have cost him too much already."

"But Lizbeth," I would reason, "you put out of the case the value of pure affection. Think of his grief if he should lose you."

But she would only turn this argument aside. One day I reproached her with selfishness. "How can you allow yourself to go out of life knowing it will make such sorrow for others?"

"Others?"

"Of course—others."

She looked away and a mist came over her eyes. Then, "Billy, I've seen it happen so often. They used to come to the hospital so hopeful, so sure that now they had given up to come to the hospital they would get well. And we always fooled them into thinking they would. But nearly always, Billy, they went down and out. We were just fooling them."

"When people go to a hospital they are generally already down and out. You haven't gone yet."

"I had a teacher at boarding school, the one I loved best of all, who went out of life in the same way. She went about in her long, black robes always coughing. She would smile and talk beautifully to us of resignation, but all the time, I know now, she

was talking to herself, bolstering up her own resignation."

"That is the trouble, Lizbeth; I never hit on it before," I exclaimed. "You've been educated to resignation. Ennis is something like that—my sister—she resigns herself to things put on her and—goes down. I believe—why Lizbeth, I believe that is a great big fault—resignation. You must not resign yourself to anything. The thing, Lizbeth, is to build up a strong wall of a will against the thing. It isn't anything good or useful—just a set of encroaching germs—nothing to be sentimental about. Build up your will to live!"

As I talked I saw it plainly. Lizbeth had lain down at the first approach of the enemy. She had accepted it as fate, as a thing put on her by her father and impossible of eradication. But she must conquer it. If I could never do another thing for her uncle in payment for all he had done for me, I must do this, I must save this girl whom he loved as his own child.

Lizbeth's eyes shone with a new light. "Billy," she confessed, "I am afraid I've made an interesting young tragedy of myself. I'm awfully afraid I have indulged the idea of an early death. I've thought too steadily of how I love life and how cruel it is that I have to leave it. I haven't thought enough

of — of others, Billy," she clutched my hand tightly, "I'll try to get well — for the sake of — of others!"

I confess to feeling a little foolish when it came over me that I had only repeated Mr. Regan's talk to me. But it bore fruit. After that old Sody had a new responsibility; every morning I saw him stumbling along to the ranchhouse with his cap in his hand and in it several large fresh eggs. Lizbeth was taking raw eggs and drinking milk, following the rules she had learned in the hospital but which she had long ago given up as useless and irksome. 'And in the meantime we walked and talked together and she cuddled down in the car whenever there was an empty place, and the storing up of armament against germs went heroically on. On one of our trips to Two Forks I urged her to see Dr. Monk who had attended our old man and me. He was an excellent physician, a little, wiry, nervous man who smoked cigarettes incessantly, but who had unusual ability and kept brushed up on the latest eastern and European methods. Invariably he returned from his post-graduate courses to take up his work in the big cattle country, for these people were like his children. He loved them and they loved him and he was deaf to all other calls.

Lizbeth agreed; and when she had bound him to secrecy, she told him about her case. When I

returned for her later she was chatting happily with the doctor. The call had done her good.

"He says, Billy," she confided as she nestled down under the robes, "that I ought to pull out of it, but there is a German treatment he wants me to take. He wants me to go to Germany with him this spring. He says it gets ahold of slow, stubborn cases and the change would do me good. He is like you, Billy, he thinks my will needs to be built up and a change is the thing to give me a new incentive. Oh, I'd love to go, if only Uncle John hadn't such a tremendous drain on him. You know, Billy—I can tell you—Uncle John is not a rich man. He is tied up with all this land and what with his ditch and heavy outlay for the settlers he is really close run for cash. If I could only make the money myself, nursing."

"In the meantime," I said, "let's work hard on the armament—keep on with the milk and eggs and open air and rest—only you never rest, Lizbeth—and maybe by spring things will be different."

She sighed, then smiled: "Yes—by spring."

How many of us were waiting for spring; for a time in the future when things would be different. As I look back on it that winter seems to me a time of passive waiting for every one but John Regan, who was steadily busy with his country's problems.

He was away all through February, and I understood he had been having conferences with Mill. He was trying to do, so people who did nothing said, an impossible thing: induce a rival road from the north to obtain franchises and build into our empire. He had had to wait a year for these conferences as he was under bail not to leave the state, and the Mill people had not visited the Northwest in that time.

Early in March a great excitement prevailed at the Q Ranch; we received word that the Mill party was actually coming. Lizbeth busied herself with Mrs. Todd's help getting the bedrooms in readiness, while Ed and his wife began a great roasting and baking in the cookhouse. I drove the car to Ossing to bring in Mr. Regan and his guests.

"Everything depends on this visit," he said to me. "Look well to your car while in Ossing. Have it gone over at the garage. Don't run any risks."

I understood his meaning perfectly but I felt that his warning was unnecessary. The visit of these men might mean a railroad; and a railroad meant life to the homesteaders. I was too intensely interested in the outcome to feel the need of caution or resistance; the thing simply could not happen again.

Almost the first man I met in the hotel lobby was Bullpit. Never since our encounter in the school

house had he directly addressed me nor had I him; but on this day he seemed desirous of being friendly. He hung around and told me the details of his business. He was in Ossing with a car to meet prospective homesteaders. He was making money, taking the first gouge out of the hardly earned cash which the poor devils brought in to get them a home. I knew he was not careful where he located them. The quickest and easiest way was Bullpit's. All too often the stranger knew nothing of soils and was wholly in Bullpit's hands. After dropping his few hundred dollars into a piece of ground that required special treatment, he would leave the country cursing it. Bullpit only shrugged his shoulders over such a departure and located the next man on the abandoned claim.

I succeeded in avoiding further meeting with him while in Ossing. At daylight with Mr. Regan and the Mill party—there were three men—I set out for Two Forks. It was a delightful, crisp, nippy day and the pungent fragrance of pine and juniper as we drove over the mountains filled the nostrils and penetrated to the senses even of these city dwellers rolled in great coats and puffing at big cigars.

Always before I had seen John Regan in a paternal rôle, driving and pushing and pulling and coaxing. With these railroad men he met minds

that met his, that worked big and constructively. He was the gracious host. He told stories of early days and stories of the present day that made one sense the great, empty country. He did not push his direct object, the bringing in of a railroad; rather, he endeavored to make these men see the country as he saw it, brimming with wealth, laden with opportunity. He worked to break down their preconceived idea of a vast desert of waste land. But they had come, I presently decided, more in a spirit of adventure and to please him than with the idea of doing business. They liked John Regan; they enjoyed his company; they were having a fine dip into cattle land; but they had not come with a serious purpose. It was an immense country—true enough—but it had no people. There was no inducement for a railroad. Besides these men represented a road that had no holdings in Oregon. This was their rival's territory; on this very trip in we passed Merriman's surveying crews making surveys that meant a stiffer hold on franchises.

"What do you want with a road?" one of them demanded of Regan. "You've got your life and it's a bully one. Man, I wish I'd had your life!"

They liked him; they were won out of coldness and reticence; they were having a good time. And I thought, after all, gifted as he was with personality,

with that which made men love him, why did he grapple with the great bottled up empire, dragging like a giant at its dead weight? How much easier to go on living his own life; he was nearing fifty; the open range would last out his days should he drop the settlers' fight. It would last out his days and he could live like some baron of old on the great Q Ranch with cars and servants at his disposal and guests such as these who would be glad to gather about him. Every one would admire him in the rôle; it was a big part on a gigantic stage; Americans loved such parts. He would gain the friendship of the O. C. Company, then the indictment would be dismissed, and his life would be one of peace. What was it that made him buckle down to the fight of the settlers, the fight for development? It was something strong and selfless; the quality that makes all really great men great, I suppose; an endowment of monumental will power, constructive ability, insight, vision, but with it all utter selflessness. Had his qualities of mind been present with selfishness what a man he might have been in Wall Street. How every one about him would have succumbed sooner or later to the sheer force of his dominating personality.

By noon the three men were calling him John and all but holding his hands. We stopped at a ranch-

house for lunch and at another that evening for dinner. Afterwards the men sat about an open fire and continued their talk. Mr. Regan called me in to join them. It was a rare experience. He got down to serious business. He pictured the homesteaders and their privations. He told his stories tersely but with magical effectiveness. I had never heard incidents so picturesquely related and always with that little humorous philosophic slant on life that gave them universal application and appeal. Never once did I hear John Regan say "I read," or "I heard," or "Some one was telling me" — every observation was ripped raw from life.

We set out for Two Forks again the following morning. Several times one or another of the men voiced my impression of the day before: "Regan, you're a fool; why do you want a railroad? If I had an empire like this all my own I'd keep it bottled." They now called it Regan's county. "How does it feel," they would ask, "to travel two days in a sixty-horse-power car and never get off your own land?" "Anybody over here ever known to differ with you, Regan?" He was a big man among big men. Long before we reached Two Forks his eminence was established; all three were looking to Regan as the genius of the party.

Bullpit and his homesteaders were ahead of us;

they had gone straight through without a stop. He came swaggering around plainly wanting to be introduced. He talked in a loud voice within hearing of the railroad men in Van Vader's lobby, and he boasted of having brought in more settlers than any other one man. Every once in a while he would break into uproarious mirth that was very disquieting. At last, getting no attention from Mr. Regan, save a brief recognition of his presence, he came over and button-holed me. He wanted me to meet a couple of men whom he thought of taking down to Happy Valley to locate. He would like me to tell them something about that country.

I was willing to talk with the men. I gave them an idea of what they were up against; of the need of a certain amount of ready cash. Bullpit quickly interrupted. "Let's have something," he said, leading the way toward the barroom. "Come on, Brent."

I turned away abruptly; he laughed. "Come on in, anyway," he added coaxingly, "that can't hurt you."

It was a silly childish taunt; it was a silly childish thing for me to resent it—and follow the men in. The new homesteaders were serious minded, intent on finding land and getting on to it. One proudly confided to me that he was a barber with five chairs;

he had sold out to go on a ranch. "And as good a stand as a man ever had," he said, "but I got the land fever." The other was a small, nervous nurseryman, who had specialized in pansies. The competition was keen and he hadn't the capital to meet it. He had sold out to a rival company and had three thousand dollars to put into developing a homestead. We were talking homesteading when Bullpit came to us with two glasses of whisky, followed by the bartender with two more. The bartender set them down on a small table which he kicked before us.

"Here's to our new homesteaders," Bullpit airily declaimed, lifting a glass and holding out the other to me. I did not take it. "Oh, come, Brent, smell like a man, anyway!" he said, and with that he tipped the glass and spilled the whiskey on to my clothes. I sprang up and struck the glass out of his hand. The two men got to their feet. With a snort Bullpit drew hastily back.

"Don't go getting hot-headed over nothing," he said. "Only a joke—just a little joke. Sit down everybody. I apologize, Brent. A man can't do more'n apologize."

Every one had looked to our corner expecting some real excitement. The enmity between Bullpit and me was well known in saloon circles; there

would be a second fight—or gun play. I was seeing red. I now understood the design back of Bullpit's show of friendliness. He had meant once more to get me drunk—it was his method of revenge and it would cripple John Regan. It might make me lose out with John Regan altogether; it might put him in the big car as driver even on this trip—drivers were scarce in the cattle country—and this in turn might supply him with information convertible into cash with the ever-spying Oceanic Cattle Company.

I had but one real responsibility: I must get the party of railway magnates safely to the Q Ranch and then out of the country. After that—Bullpit.

I turned to go out and saw Van Vader. He had just opened the door from the lobby.

"Wire for you, Brent," he said, without interest. He held a yellow envelope in his hand. I went quickly to receive it. This was the message from Ennis: "Grandfather in deep trouble. Come at once."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE OLD HOME BACK EAST

ON the train going East the old worrying habit came back to me. What had happened to grandfather? Was it a financial matter? If so, what could I do? My ranch would bring little money now, and it was all I had in the world. I had no earning power back East. The most ordinary clerk who had been back of a desk while I had been ranching would command a far better salary.

I found the old home place badly run down. The lawn was covered with dead winter grass which should have been cut in the autumn. Weeds showed between the bricks of the old-fashioned walk which led up to the front door. Trees, bare of foliage, rattled skeleton limbs against the house. They needed trimming. The green blinds were tightly closed; the house itself needed repainting. Everything looked neglected.

The door was locked. I rang the bell. There was no response. I listened and waited. At last I heard a faint stirring above the porch roof. I stepped back on to the walk and looked up. A thin, white

hand lifted the window blind, and large frightened eyes peered cautiously beneath.

"Claire, it is I—Billy," I called to her.

She dropped the blind and I heard her step as she ran down the stairs; she opened the door—a white-faced ghost of a girl with dark shadows beneath her large blue eyes, and claw-like hands that clutched at an old, faded cotton kimono which clung about her like a wilted thing. It was early morning.

"Oh Billy," she cried, mechanically lifting her face to mine for a hurried kiss, "You're just in time. We couldn't have held out another day alone, Ennis and I."

"What is it?" I asked, pushing my way into the darkened hall. I wanted to throw open every window blind and let in a rush of sunny air. "What has happened to Grandfather?" Already I felt the blackness coming over me, like the return of some dread disease of which one had thought himself freed.

"We don't know; something terrible—we're afraid it's his mind. He—he doesn't know either of us." She began to cry.

"My God, Claire, haven't you had a doctor?"

"We—we didn't want it to get out. Oh, Billy, if any one should know! We thought with the three of us we could keep it secret."

I gave Claire one look as she stood there shaking with sobs, weak, futile, possessed by a solitary passion, the passion for appearances; and I strode past her up the stairs to my grandfather's room. I could feel my lips—my whole being—stiffening in a tension as in the old days—but I wanted to be kind to my sisters. I pushed open the door and faced Ennis: Ennis, older than she had any right to be, sharper featured, thinner, but as obstinate as ever. She kissed me absently, her eyes roving. Was I well? Did I have a good journey? I pushed past her to the bed where lay grandfather. His great frame was outlined under the coverlet, his massive head lay quiet on the pillow, but his hands moved ceaselessly, picking at the sheet's hem. I bent over him.

"Grandfather," I said. He lifted his eyes, a momentary light swept his face. I knelt beside him, choking. Always my love for him had been two-thirds admiration. He was so strong, so capable, so everything that the rest of my family were not. Again I called to him: "Grandfather!"

He turned perplexedly to Ennis: "This is someone I—like," he said in a bewildered wandering voice. The puzzled look passed and he gave his attention to the sheet hem.

I buried my face in the bed clothes. This, my

grandfather—this, my home coming! In the rare dream that had come to me—the dream of some day going back—it had all been so different. I rose and turned to Ennis.

“You must send for a physician at once.” She consented, dully.

There was little to be done. It was a break-down—so the physician told me—of brain tissue, and the end would come when the rest of his splendid body should respond to the final decay of his brain. Grandfather was not old—seventy-five—but he had had financial worries extending over a decade and culminating in the loss of his fortune. Early alcoholism—so I gathered from my talk with the physician, a man of brisk manner and honest in his analysis—alcoholism had weakened the tissue and left it unequal to the strain. An easier mind toward the end of his life might have saved him this humiliating withdrawal. Nothing could now be done. It might be a matter of a few weeks, it might be years. He had a wonderful constitution.

Each morning when I stopped by his bedside a light would sweep over his face; he seemed glad of my presence but he could not place me. Once he said with a suggestion of his earlier manner, “I had a fine boy—a fine boy, sir. His name was Willie. Willie would be here, sir, but he is detained

elsewhere." There was tremendous dignity in his apology. It was harder to bear than his periods of weeping and weakness.

He rarely talked, remaining silent for hours. Some days he would dress and wander about the house, restlessly, silently; again he would lie abed all day picking endlessly at the sheet's hem. I gathered from Ennis's account that the break had been coming on for over a year, though she had not recognized it as such. His perpetual gloom, his long periods of silence and his desire to be alone told me this. For a year he had gone to his room, nightly, immediately after dinner—having eaten scarcely a mouthful—and had sat staring vacantly at his hands, until Ennis would come and get him to bed. This was wholly unlike him—he had been a most social man, a great talker, devoted to his family but loving his friends. What Ennis had attributed to "worry" had been the beginning of brain-decay; only when he ceased to know her did she realize the gravity of his condition. The women of our family had spent so much time being "blue" as they called it, that she did not recognize the thing as a disease.

I went into his business affairs and found there was little left save the home place and this was heavily mortgaged. It was trying to save this last

valuable possession that had broken him down. Our home covered a block, but that part of the city had been taken by business, and as residence property it had lost value. However, it had acquired a business valuation. Real estate was not moving and the prospect of a sale was poor. The mortgage was long overdue and the interest unpaid. Grandfather's life was insured and this would be all my sisters would have.

As I divided my time between caring for him and attempting to straighten out his affairs, I grew accustomed to the idea of his going out—already it seemed that he had gone, so little was there left but the majestic frame and this seemed shrinking before my eyes—and I began to plan for Ennis and Claire. When the end should come, they must close the memory-haunted house with its massive oak furniture and its glittering family silver—I had forgotten what a heaviness of equipment weighted the place down—and they must come to my ranch out in the last West. They must come to youth and sunshine and light and open air, where everything was at its beginning, where everyone worked openly at his problem. They must have saddle horses, they must make gardens—I would build them a house—and they must forget that life which they had known, which had been too much

dominated by what-will-people-think, and replace it with constructive activity.

The very city got on my nerves. The crowded subways, the herded men and women, the colorless faces, the artificial life—how repellant it all was, how out of harmony with the promise of joyous living that comes in childhood! And yet I could not say—even in my mind—“Go West!” to these hordes. There were the broad, free acres which cried loudly for the healthy labor of these dwindling hands, and the reward was more than generous; but these people—even if they so minded—could not be turned back to the soil. Without capital to carry them a year or so the struggle would be futile. Aside from the matter of railroads, there was a big gap in our government’s plan to settle the West. The poor man, the man aching for his chance in the world, the man who would be most benefited by free acres, was hopelessly shut off from this opportunity; it belonged in the last analysis to the rich man, him only.

And again, how little was the great empty West understood in the East; how little had my grandfather known of what he was sending me into.

As day after day I became a part of the crowding, milling herd that scrambled for foot room in the subway, I thought more about life in general than

I had ever done before. What was it all about? What was it for? What was important? and back came the answer: Three wholesome meals daily for every human being; open space to live in; clean air to breathe; enough work to appreciate rest; enough leisure to appreciate work; some of the luxuries; and the helping hand such as our old man gave; this for all men and women without fear.

Fear had been the great bugaboo of our lives; fear and worry and inaction. Was fear the universal bugaboo—fear of the future? Fear of the untried? Did not fear breed the rest—worry and inaction?

Strangely, I met few of our old friends, so completely had my sisters withdrawn into their four square walls. They had dropped out of things and things had gone on without them. It was as they wished; if they could not keep up appearances they preferred to be forgotten.

One evening when we were sitting by the open fire—the same fireplace in which had been reflected all our joys and sorrows since infancy—I told the girls of the condition in which I had found grandfather's affairs. "There is very little money," I said. "We will soon have to raise more for running expenses."

They both drew long faces and sighed deeply. Ennis suggested that I sell my ranch. "Sell your

ranch, Billy, and let's center everything in saving the home," she went on, "the home where we were all born, where father and mother died."

Something gripped at my heart. "It would not sell." I answered her abruptly. The dreary old home with its tottering foundations, its mouldy walls, its massive furniture—I could more easily have set fire to it; and yet it had a certain hold on my affections—but a melancholy hold.

"Then what's the ranch worth?" Ennis demanded, impatiently. "What is all your work out there worth, Billy?" she moved nearer me. "You must stay at home now and take up business and keep up the old home; it's your place."

The bare suggestion made me suffocate. "It isn't possible," I said.

"Why? You made money out West, you could make more here. Of course you must take up your life here again, Billy, and live—like a gentleman."

I sat a long time looking into the flickering fire. I could not make her understand what my ranch meant to me. My letters had evidently conveyed nothing. The mere fact of my hair having gone white was a calamity that offset any good which I may have gained from the West. She remembered that our mother's hair had turned when she was

young—perhaps it was a family trait—but still it depressed her and added to her complete assurance that the ranch was not the thing for me.

As I sat thinking over the differences—the things I could not make my sisters understand—a softness stole over me. Poor girls, neither would ever know the joy in mere living that I had gained from my tussle with elemental things. In the firelight came pictures—my wheatfields that were to be, my butte, nosing gracefully down like some great animal, prone and at rest, the coyotes silhouetted against the



Susie

clear night sky as I had so often watched them from Mother Lattig's when they came nightly to the top of my butte to howl, squatted on their haunches the better to perform—sturdy little Tenttown—then came a brave young face and eyes that looked

levelly into mine—eyes that twinkled at times—like stars.

“There is Susie,” I almost whispered the name—like some sacred word. Something—the firelight—drew my long unrealized dream into words I had not before spoken even to myself. “A wonderful little girl, brave, fearless, loyal, the embodied spirit of the last West, the spirit of the west wind that some way has character in it. Some day—I will have her with me always.” Somehow, some way, the impossible was to be. I was to have Susie—it was all in the firelight.

“Billy!” It was a shriek from Ennis. “You don’t mean to tell me that on top of everything else you are to marry that rough, cowpunching ranch girl?” Her face was tragic.

“What will every one say,” moaned Claire.

The low fire fell into ashes. I sat up and looked at my two anaemic, attenuated sisters.

“Why not Lizbeth?” Ennis went on sharply, her eyes flashing, her flat, thin nostrils quivering. “Lizbeth—from what you have written me—seems at least possible. Why not Lizbeth?”

I got up and went over to the window. Dead tree branches were driven by gusts of rain monotonously against the pane. The fire had flickered out and

Ennis' economy would not let her put on more wood. The room was gloomy; she was saving on lights. There did not occur to me one thing in all the dead past connected with that house to which it would be good to cling. Nothing but melancholy memories better a thousand times forgotten.

Further discussion was out of the question. A reticence grew up between my sisters and myself. We went through the duties each day, I dividing the time between my grandfather's office and my care of him, the girls attending to the housework, going about with compressed lips and worried faces, speaking in the low tones of a death chamber. The gloom never for a moment lifted. It was strange how alike the girls had grown. Claire would never have the strength of will, the obstinacy, of Ennis; she was hysterical, while Ennis was inclined to keep a stiff upper lip, to make herself go through with things. But in viewpoint they were one.

Grandfather's condition did not change. My presence no longer brought comfort even to my sisters. There was that something always between us. We lived on a strain. They had apparently made up their minds to remain "sweet," they would have no more scenes, but they could not forgive my descent in life. I had appeared well, prosperous, buoyant. I could take my place again in the world

and reinstate my family—and I would not. I lacked family pride. Nothing more was to be said.

But it was the coming necessity of actual cash to run the house that at last drove me back to the West. I could return to Two Forks and earn one hundred dollars a month driving John Regan's car, and this I could send home for household expenses. I refrained from putting further suffering on the girls by telling them how I was to earn this money, a thing they never could have faced—and lived.

Before leaving I effected an arrangement by which my sisters would be left in possession of the old home until my grandfather's death. I closed up his affairs as nearly as possible. The day I left I spent the afternoon by his side in a last unavailing attempt to make him know me.

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CHAPTER XXV.

MOTHER INN

AT Two Forks a telegram—three days old— informed me that Grandfather had passed out of life the night I left. There was no reason for my returning. The girls did not need me—the insurance money would take care of them—and the funeral was over.

I learned from Van Vader that Tom Lattig was now driving John Regan's car. Bullpit, it seemed, had left the country, the activities of certain defrauded homesteaders having made life too uncertain in these parts for further dalliance. I decided to go at once to my ranch.

Mother Lattig was all tears and voluble sympathy over my bereavement, and happiness over seeing me again. She was very lonesome with Tom away, but Tom needed the money, and of course there were more travelers now; almost daily she had guests for dinner. She was making money.

I wanted something to do, something for my hands, and quickly. I wanted to get to work, to get back again into the midst of things physical and

constructive. The heavy weight of blackness which had settled down over my spirit in the East had not lifted. I must work out of it, work back into the wholesomeness of the country. Mother Lattig was declaiming on the number of meals she had served since I went away. She kept the money in a piece of lead pipe—something Tom had picked up somewhere—which she drove “down into de ranch.” She now brought it in for me to see—dug fresh from the earth. “No white-livered pig will steal dat—you tink?”

I congratulated her on her bank and suggested that she have a sign, that we name the place “Mother Inn.” She slapped me on the shoulders and squeezed my arm and laughed about it, then stopped short in her affectionate outburst with, “Dat fine plan; you make heem sign; I put heem up; make heem fine—like you make for dat poor young man we put down under de ranch last winter.”

I went to the lumber pile and selected a smooth board, sawed off a three-foot length, and bringing it back to the doorway, proceeded to carve out the letters, Mother Lattig watching and exclaiming and approving at every stroke of the knife. It was something to do while I tried to think out what I should do next. I still had some money, but I couldn't decide just where to begin, what to do first.

In the blackness that gripped me nothing moved. I did not want to see anyone until this mood should pass. I had not even stopped at Tenttown on my way in. I could see no one yet.

We stained the board brown and painted the letters white and Mother Lattig was enraptured. The work consumed the whole evening. In spite of Mother Lattig's protests I went to my own ranch to sleep. I was awakened the next morning by the meadow larks singing their rapturous insistence on spring. Never, it seemed to me, had they sung so gloriously, spilled such a volume of liquid notes on the air; and a bounding sensation of spring was all through me. My cabin door, wide open, let in a flood of sunlight on clean-smelling sage-scented air. Life, golden life, flooded my whole being.

I got into my clothes whistling. I went outside and looked about as on a new world. Life was full of joy again. The air—even in May—was bracing. I climbed to the top of the butte and gazed long over the valley—it was a cheering picture—growth, life, new beginnings. I began to dream. I should build a look-out tower at once, and in it would be a huge fireplace. Ennis would send my big leather chair, books, pictures, and pennants from my old den—she had spoken of this when I left—and I would stay in this forever-land forever.

I went over to Mother Lattig's, all my being singing in tune with the rhythmic singing earth. I seized her round her ample waist and waltzed her about the cabin while she waved her griddle-cake turner, cracking my head whenever she could manage it—and always there would be Mother Lattig.

“Foolishness on you, foolishness on you! Any one might tink you vas de one!” she cried at last.

“I am, Mother Lattig—what one?”

We stopped waltzing; she stood off puffing and blowing, trying desperately to get words.

“Him—Tom—engage to Susie; you too much troubled last night for silly gossip; bimeby—Whooppee!” she made a great cradle swinging of her big arms, “much babee play down on to de ranch. Oh, mine gootness, dey burn!” And she turned excitedly to the stove where sourdough hot cakes were sending up a perilous smoke.

Tom—engaged to Susie! For no reason whatever—there could be no reason—the light died out of the sunshine, the tower dream crumbled to ashes.

CHAPTER XXVI

COYOTE BUTTE RANCH

I SENT to Two Forks by a passing homesteader for supplies. I meant to establish real bachelor quarters and work on my ranch. Mother Lattig, between ejaculations of violent protest, insisted on initiating me into the mysteries of sourdough, and presenting me with the rattiest of Hungry's pups.

Hungry had belonged to a traveler going south in search of land; with rare prescience she had remained with Mother Lattig. She was a mixture of bull and collie, a fine watchdog devoted to the Lattig premises. I don't know what her pups were, but they were dear to Mother Lattig who had lost her dog "Deck" and had not ceased bewailing her loss until the arrival of Hungry's litter. I tried to be appreciative of troublesome little Tyke and not to care when he chewed up my only decent hat, an imported English cloth, the like of which I would not soon see again. In time I came to be really fond of him. No man can be altogether desolate so long as a dog loves him.

All summer I worked like a foreigner. I fenced one hundred acres and put it in barley. I spent much time on my desert claim and managed to finish digging the well. The sagebrush there was as large and husky as young juniper trees; it made excellent wood, which I hauled to my homestead and to mother Lattig's. I wore myself out so completely each day that by night I had hardly sufficient energy to cook a snack and respond to Tyke's affectionate attentions. I desired only numbness, and to be let alone. Every one was busy and little visiting was done. The long, hard winter on a potato and bean diet had made every homesteader alive to but one necessity, that of a good big root crop against another winter's needs. A few had cows, and their winter feed was also a problem.

Occasionally I talked with travelers who stopped at Mother Lattig's. I heard frequent criticisms of John Regan. He was the only man in the whole country who was trying to put through a definite plan for a railroad, and naturally every move he made was open to discussion. Had he only done this or that, why, a railroad would have come in long ago. Other powerful cattlemen did not want a railroad. They were of the O. C. persuasion. Railroads brought competition. Who wanted more

people in the country? Let the country alone. What did Regan want to dig a canal for, anyway? Served him damned right, getting indicted. Had no business interfering with Nature. Nature made the tule swamp and she likely knew what she was about.

But the homesteaders were a solid front for John Regan. "He does his part all right, Uncle John," our old man would say. He had his doubts at times about God and Uncle Sam, but he never doubted John Regan. They all knew where they could get grain or hay on time or an extra team when a horse went lame or help in sickness or disaster. His case had again been postponed.

And so the summer passed in hard work by day and brute sleep by night; the fall I spent plowing for the winter fallow.

One afternoon in February Tom Lattig drove up to my door with John Regan. "Well, well, Billy," the big cattleman said, "but you've got a pretty place here." Our hands met and his clasp was firm and strong and hearty. "A mighty pretty place."

"It will do," I said, conscious of pride in it in spite of everything. I shook hands with Tom.

"And you're looking fit, Billy; a better man than before you fell in the well. No wells on your place." He laughed as he glanced at my spring. Then, "I'm just getting home; making the rounds of the

ranches, and I wanted to see you, Billy, that's all; just wanted to see you."

"You've been away?" He had refused to come into the shack.

He laughed. "You're a real settler — don't know the news off your own ranch. Billy, I've been working with the legislature; working night and day; it's the hardest thing to make them see it, but we'll get it."

"Get what?"

"Why, you see, Billy, I didn't get much encouragement from Mill. It'll be expensive getting a road through Roaring Canyon — a matter of millions, and Merriman has got it tied up — it'd be a fight such as a railroad never went up against before — and I can't so much blame Mill; but just the same, Billy, we've got to have relief — and quick. I've been working the legislature up to the point of letting the people vote on a bonding act so the state can build her own railroads. It's taken all the power I could muster to force the privilege through — the privilege of allowing the people to vote on such a measure. It will be a state-owned railroad. It's to be put up to the people and we will have a year to educate them on it. The trouble is, all the land is over here in our part of the state and all the people are wadded up in cities over on the coast. We've got to get

those city people to vote for our relief. Of course it is their relief in the biggest sort of a way, but they won't see it that way until it's pointed out. Here they've been working all these years to build up machinery to do business, to build cities and develop waterways for hauling, and they've never stopped to think that there will be nothing to haul unless the interior country is opened up. What is the good of a port with nothing to ship out? It isn't what you ship in, Billy, that makes a country, but what you ship out.

"Now, our work is to make those people in the coast cities who are grasping for more and bigger business see that our relief is their relief, that they must vote bonds to open up our country for their own sakes. They hold fairs and festivals and have parades and advertise big for the country business, not realizing there isn't any country business to speak of. If they would put a railroad in here and get ten thousand ranchers raising wheat and alfalfa and shipping it out to their markets—why, the money would flow in to them. If we could head a big delegation of business men over into this country so they could see the homesteaders' tents and little patches of clearing that mean root crops for bare existence for next winter, they wouldn't bellow so big for the surplus; they would see there wasn't

going to be any surplus. We can't get them over here in sufficiently large numbers, Billy, but we can take the story to them and take it strong."

While he talked a plan shaped itself in my head. I would go with him if he would accept me. I had been an easy debater at college—they had prophesied great things for me in those days—and I would go into this thing with my whole being. When he finished I said: "Mr. Regan, could I be useful? Will you trust me in town now?"

His hand went out to my shoulder and he slapped it heartily, at the same time chuckling his hearty little chuckle: "Trust you, boy? To the world's end. Come along. I've brought the Book-farmer back and he will finish your plowing."

On the way to the Q Ranch he outlined his plan of campaign. We were to speak steadily in all the larger towns and cities. He wanted me to tell the story of the homesteader, his problems and his courage in meeting them. He wanted the public to realize what it meant to pioneer at the present time. He wanted the public to get in sympathy with the man of small means who was trying to make a home for himself in the country. Already a thrilling speech was forming itself in my mind enlivened with stories—Mother Lattig and her garden, the young man we buried "down under de ranch," the Dutchman who

nearly lost his reason over his disasters and hardships and his courageous wife who built the road over Wind Mountain, the Dane's starved wife when the frost caught her vegetables, our old man's lost leg. I was thinking it all out, thrilling to it.

"You see, it will pretty nearly depend on you, Billy," he said in his quietly dominating way. "I've still got that trial ahead of me." Again it had been postponed.

We stopped by the dredge. It was sunk three-fourths in mud and slime. He made no comment and we drove on, but his face changed to an expression of large-hearted anger. "It will just about depend on you, Billy, to get the bonding act through. There's not many wanting it—they'll think of the little extra tax it will add. There's nobody hot on the trail over here that I can use but you. You had a fine family back of you, Billy. It's grand old blood; you'll be enlisting it in as great a cause as ever fell to one of them."

How did he do it, so easily, so unconsciously? Or was he a great conscious artist? It is hard to say.

"Lizbeth'll be right glad to see you again, Billy; Lizbeth's pulled through the winter fine so far. She's going away—Lizbeth."

Did he know? He might—and then again he might not.

"Lizbeth's going to Germany with Dr. Monk and his wife. It will be a nice trip for Lizbeth."

"It will be just the thing for her," I agreed.

As we drove in at the Q Ranch I had a happy getting-back-home feeling. We met old Sody in a blue jumper shirt and much shrunken overalls, peering through near-sighted eyes as he made his way rapidly with short steps to the cookhouse, a duck feebly squawking under his arm. He only nodded, completely absorbed in his latest leppy's difficulties. The leppy baby was in a wonderful perambulator, crowing his lungs out in the sun on the wide porch, his startled-eyed mother in awe of his greater forcefulness and yielding to his demands. The gong sounded for dinner as we stopped before the ranchhouse, bringing Lizbeth on to the porch. She came running to greet us, very pretty in a long, white sweater and a gray skirt that repeated the gray of her eyes. She claimed perfect health. She was chatty and gay and made fun of my shirt which I had bought of Sol Sneed, who carried but one size, the largest, to accommodate his entire trade. She promised to cut it over and make the collar fit if I would stay in bed next day.

On the way over to the cookhouse for dinner she slipped her arm in mine in a happy, confidential manner that was very engaging, and told me that the

doctor had given her some surgical cases that had helped her raise part of the money for the trip. "I couldn't go, otherwise," she said. "Poor Uncle John is about strapped. Oh, but I am so much better, Billy, and it was you who started the cure; you made me see how selfish I was to die and leave him. Who under the sun would unlace his shoes? I shudder when I think of his sleeping in them the rest of his life. Why did you stay away so long, Billy?"

"I've been ranching," I said. "You should see my barley."

She gave a final happy little squeeze to my arm and ran up the cookhouse steps ahead of me. It was good to be back.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RAILROAD AT LAST

MR. REGAN'S case finally came up for trial and was dismissed. When the district attorney got down to it he was so incensed over the finding that he kicked the special agent out of his office—not very dignified proceedings for a district attorney, but warranted. He wished the question settled for all time whether he was to be a tool for special agents or to be used as the machinery of justice. Life was pretty unpleasant for those back of the indictment.

The juniper wood had been taken from Jackass Mountain, and the newspapers, finally getting busy on the thing, dubbed it "jackass conservation." They wrote columns on Mr. Regan's usefulness to his state. They began to see in him more than the picturesque cattle man with a fund of inimitable stories; they saw the man large and his design large. John Regan's fight was for his state. He was blocking only the plans of the powerful O. C. Company, and this company meant nothing to the state's future. Its power was wholly local, controlling the

small handful of people who did business at Two Forks.

After planning the campaign with me in Portland, Mr. Regan returned to the Q Ranch. He had to purchase a new dredger and begin all over again to dig the canal through the treacherous swamps and bottomless bogs of the Tule Valley. The old dredger was useless. It must be got out of the way, a crew organized and work started. This would mean that the wood choppers would go again to the juniper hills. Our old man would not be able to chop wood—there wasn't much relief in sight for him—but Ed and Jim were ready to run the wood chopping; and Susie was provided for; she would not be trapping coyotes and cats this winter at any rate. I tried to be glad.

I was steadily busy all the rest of the spring and summer. The bonds were not popular. No one wanted his taxes increased. No one realized the stored-up wealth of the great inland empire. "Sagebrush legislation," a pompous young banker sneered. "We've no time for petty things of that sort. What we want is an open waterway to the sea."

"For what purpose?" I asked.

"For shipping," he retorted in a tone that showed contempt for my intelligence.

"What shipping?"

"Why, everything, of course — lumber — stock — wheat."

"What is the use of an open waterway to a locked granary?"

"Any way," they would always fall back on this, "our taxes are too high as it is."

It was an uphill pull. They were stone blind to this way out for them. I found all the coast towns suffering from hard times. The merchants had over-bought, and the people were not spending money. There were too many cities for the amount of producing country. The more I traveled through the seaport towns the more I realized what the great interior country could mean to them. The two sides of the state depended absolutely upon each other. There were splendid natural ports with scarcely any commerce, and there was the vast interior region with no outlet. The thing grew in my mind until the blindness of the people became unthinkable. Everywhere I met the utmost lethargy. Only now and then did I meet a man who could see the thing, and only now and then did I meet a man who had ever penetrated the great bottled-up empire that constituted two-thirds of his state. One railroad had purposely kept it bottled for over a quarter of a century, and no other had attempted to break in.

This attitude of the railroads minimized in the people's mind the value of the shut-in territory.

Mr. Regan was with me at times. He was having all kinds of trouble with his new dredger. There were few workmen in the country able to handle the thing, and he had had to get outside help. The swamp was apparently bottomless, machinery would break, and weeks would elapse before new parts could be brought in. He had taken off his own coat and gone on the dredger himself, working a month to get the thing going. And all the time there were those scattered all over the country who stuck out their chins and proclaimed doggedly, "He can't do it!" It had never been done before; everything was new and untried; you never knew what the soil would do, how the boggy swamp would act. He had to show them that it could be done, and neither had he a precedent to go by. Ditch workers living away from their families became homesick. There was no place to go after they knocked off work; just the desert, the endless desert; they were easily dissatisfied. There was the possibility constantly to be avoided of men throwing up the job and leaving the dredger to sink into the mire. So Mr. Regan had to be almost steadily on the job. When he was with me our campaign took on giant strides. His personality won the people,

and his earnestness got the thing in a measure under their skin.

Another thing, he had to raise money to go on with the canal. It was costing ten thousand dollars a mile and this meant a weekly payroll of ready cash. He raised the money by putting a mortgage on the Q Ranch. And here entered his personal problem: Suppose the canal were successfully completed, the swamp drained and the arid acres irrigated. Without a railroad to haul out crops this great body of reclaimed land would continue as unproductive of income as at the present time. Thousands of dollars would be locked up in an investment that could not pay interest. And all the time the canal would have to be kept in repair—a two hundred and fifty thousand dollar project for the convenience of wildcats and coyotes!

A railroad had to come. The failure to unlock the country would mean failure to every one of the homesteaders, to every one of the toiling, hoping men and women bent on making a home in the wilderness. It meant failure to Mr. Regan, the wiping out of a lifetime's work, a lifetime's fight for the country's settlement; it meant the triumph of the powerful O. C. Company, who under a blind kept speakers in the field fighting the bonds; and I could not help thinking in this connection of one of their

small tools, the little red-faced, burned-out Bullpit; yes, it would mean his triumph.

I had no idea of giving up the fight. It would have been as easy to let a ship full of people sink because one was tired of shoveling coal below decks. I had no intention of giving it up; but more and more as the months wore on, I wondered if it were not useless. The people were not ready for the bonds. They would look about at the unfarmed patches of land along the coast and say: "Let the ranchers come over here, where we already have a railroad; our valleys are not thickly populated; we can use more ranchers. Let them come over here." It was impossible to make them see the difference between the two sides of the state. To clear an acre on the coast of its monster fir and spruce and cedar would take more out of a man than to clear one hundred and sixty acres of sagebrush. One year's good work on a ranch in the interior would make it a producer; one year's work on a coast ranch would scarcely reclaim a garden patch.

They couldn't see it, or they wouldn't; the fear of an increase in taxes was a black patch ever before their eyes that shut out the larger view. Mr. Regan began a personal campaign among the commercial bodies—if anyone should be able to see it they should—but each of these bodies was representa-

tive of its own locality. What would the bonding act do for their county, for their town? These bonds were to build a railroad over east of the mountains and their interests were west of the mountains. Old Sol Sneed's "What's in it for me?" came back to me time and again. He was of a numerous company. They were pinned down to the local needs, getting out booklets and pamphlets descriptive of their own localities. They couldn't endorse a plan to increase the taxes for something that would not pave their own streets, build their own courthouses, erect their own school buildings. They could not see the possible millions of acres in wheat and what it would mean to the state.

Mr. Regan's patience was wonderful. Always quiet, calm, ready to reason, explain, or whip men in line, he never once lost his poise. It was the patience of the desert, of time, of eternity; but not the patience of inertia. He was busy every minute, though never seeming hurried. Five hours of sleep was doing him these days. He had no time for relaxation.

One night he joined me after I had been speaking before a suburban boosters' club. He drove out himself and took me away. We went into the country and for a long time he said nothing. I was discouraged. The people had listened appreciatively,

but when the question was thrown open for discussion a little neighborhood merchant had got to his feet and declaimed in Fourth of July oratory of the neighborhood's immediate needs. He wanted plans made for a local sweet-pea show and prizes decided upon. He turned the tide against the bonds. He was a merchant, but he couldn't see the local gain in greater prosperity for his whole state. He was pinching the nickels and dimes in his own bailiwick, keeping them in close at home circulation. He hadn't the understanding to realize that the basis of prosperity must be in the soil.

I had been educated by experience and by Mr. Regan. I admitted my greater opportunities. But this did not make it any easier to have patience. Why couldn't they see it?

We drove along in the starlight. The quiet of the night stole over me.

"There's nothing so good as the night," Regan said at last. "The night when no one's using it."

After a long time I asked him questions of the people at home: "See anything of Bullpit?"

"Oh, he's feeblin' around Ossing."

His indifference in someway put the man where I had not been able to put him with all my herculean contempt.

"How's old Cruikshank?" All winter he had

been hiring men off the dredger, principally the foremen.

"He's sick, I hear; pretty sick; cancer or something." Then presently: "It's just been the cayuse in Cruikshank; he couldn't help being a cayuse instead of a thoroughbred."

And so this was the inglorious end of Regan's lifetime enemy! But I was not permitted to dwell on it. He chuckled in a way that always proclaimed a story: "Old Sody, Billy, Old Sody—he had a right clever answer for the railroad men. Ever hear old Sody's answer? You see Bullpit—he drove us down—took Mill out to the corrals, spotting things. Mill had seen the Q Ranch orchard, but he was skeptical about its bearing. So he says to old Sody: 'How often does the orchard bear?' And old Sody, he cocks his head to one side and squints up his watery old eyes, and scratches his stubby old chin, considering like, and he says, at last, real judicial, 'I ain't never known it to beat once a year.' Mill had to come in and tell me about it, he thought it was so good."

The laugh cleared the atmosphere.

"You speak well, Billy," he went on presently, "you speak awful well; you don't use any of those hand-picked words. I wouldn't wonder, Billy, when all this railroad business is settled but what you'd

go into politics. I'd like to see you there, Billy, in the legislature, and some day back at Washington. You speak awful well, Billy — and direct; no hand-picked words."

It seemed a long time since I had climbed into the car down-hearted; and yet we were not many miles out in the country, and hardly an hour had passed; but I had been sitting alongside him, alongside the man who first put responsibility on me.

I should not leave the impression that it was all a campaign of discouragement. The newspapers gave us respectful consideration, and the two largest in the state took opposite sides and carried on a fight of their own that helped so far as publicity was concerned. But votes were the things we were after and so many were in the habit of voting "No" on increased taxation, that I feared they would file their "No" against this measure when it came to the polls. The general sentiment was not encouraging.

One night in January Mr. Regan overtook me at a commercial club banquet in the southern part of the state. The speaker had given me an opportunity to present my subject and the men had listened attentively. Afterward there had been some clever stunts and good fellowship was in the air. The

banquet was in honor of some publicity men from one of the larger cities.

I noticed the moment he entered the hall—and his entrance was a signal for an uproar, for he was universally popular, his picturesque face and figure being known from one end of the state to the other—I noticed at once a light in his eyes that was not merely a response to their hilarious greeting; it was the light that shines from good news. Men surrounded him and he was escorted to the speaker's table; every one pounded the table and demanded a speech. With the light burning steadily he took the floor and looked about the square of faces:

"Boys," he said, "I've good news and I don't know anyone I'd rather share it with. Mill will be building into the inland empire the first of next month."

CHAPTER XXVIII

EVERYBODY'S BACK

THIS is the thing that had happened: Mill, seeing the prospect of municipal-owned railroads in Oregon, had been working secretly for months to get a right of way through Roaring Canyon. One of his men, disguised as a sportsman, had fished and hunted up and down the length of the Canyon, gradually buying up ranches and old rights-of-way that had been secured by earlier would-be railroad builders and then abandoned. Regan had made him see the country, but it had been his play to appear disinterested. With the announcement in the newspapers of the coming Mill road, came a similar announcement from the Merriman people that they would build through Roaring Canyon at once. Instead of one road we were to have two.

John Regan returned to his dredger, for though the canal was through its worst experimental stages it still needed his presence. I arranged to do some special work at the state agricultural college; I was determined to make my ranches first-class producers, and I had a great deal to learn about both irriga-

tion and dry farming. The study proved the most interesting I had ever had; soils, crops, stock testing—it was all live, vital information dealing directly with the problems with which I had ignorantly struggled.

A series of short courses were being planned for farmers all over the state; this was the result of a bill on which John Regan had worked for years. The bill had passed and the fund was now available. A lecturer was to be put in the field. The president of the college approached me one day about this work. He said he thought I was the man to do it. The salary was not large, but it would meet my needs. I accepted the offer for the following winter.

One morning in May a thirst came over me—a thirst for my spring—and a yearning for the silence of the great desert. I had engaged the Book-farmer to put in my crop, I was not needed, but I was homesick for my ranch.

And so in the course of a few days I found myself riding old Sol up Wind Mountain. I stopped at the top and gazed across Happy Valley. It was dotted with green patches that told of spring-wheat on a hundred ranches. Tenttown had almost wholly disappeared, replaced by a considerable group of stone houses and board cabins. Further away toward the hills, bright new white spots glistened in the sun,

the tents of more recent homesteaders who had flocked in since the Mill road was assured. I spurred up old Sol and rode down into Happy Valley. The railroad survey had followed through the center. Our old man had been right.

Mother Clark had her house. It was of pale, salmon-pink stone, very pretty in the sage-green country. Beside it stood a small frame building, the post-office. I heard a piano, and before I could dismount Mother Clark was at the door. She was a picture of contentment. Her eyes shone. She wore a blue calico dress spotlessly clean and ironed till it shone, and a white apron edged with tatting. Mother Clark's spotlessness in a tent had always amazed me.

"Well, if it ain't Billy!" she called. She hesitated a second and I hurried up the steps. She put her arms about my neck and kissed me. We went inside.

"And a piano, too!" I said, gazing about at the large, attractive room with its open fireplace now filled with wild flowers, its pictures cut from the backs of magazines, and the piano.

"Yes—that was Susie's doin's. She arranged with the dealer as soon as she got to San Francisco to have the payments extended and the piano shipped."

"Susie—in San Francisco?"

"Hadn't you heard? Susie's been away at school all year." Her eyes glowed with pride. "Susie—she was always that set on it, so her pa sold his desert claim and sent her; Susie's our last," she added, half apologetically. Evidently the Clarks had been criticized for selling their desert claim; but it told me another thing—land in Happy Valley was getting a value.

"And how is Mr. Clark?"

"He's built up pretty well. He'll be that sorry not to see you. He's away with the mail—takes him and Ed both now with a double team apiece—forty thousand pounds a week—parcel post done it."

"Forty thousand pounds—then the contract is a money maker?"

She looked a little crestfallen. "It ain't that—you see the parcel post doubled up teams and time, but the pay's just the same; pa loses on it, but he says the folks has got to have their parcel post, and it won't be so long now—two years they figure and the railroad will be in."

I looked at Mother Clark's happy mother face, and I thought of these two who had made it possible for so many others to get ahead and who were still unselfishly helping and glad to do it. She

was at last "set down among her children," and she had a house and a piano, and our old man was not being interfered with in his altruistic designs, not knowing in the least that they were altruistic. She went on to tell me of a new one that had arrived in Ed's family. "Ed's doin' just fine," she said, proudly. "Got four wells on his desert claim, and it's all in wheat. Couldn't get him off the ranch now; says he always knew a ranch was what he wanted. And Billy, you should see that baby!" She bustled up and started for the door. Ed's stone house was on the site of his original tent, and Jim's was nearly as handy.

"Not this time," I said. "I'll see him later."

I rode on down the valley.

Mother Lattig had the largest house of them all. The lower story was of native stone in contrasting layers of pink and white and the upper of shingles. I wondered at the size of it, but as I came nearer I recognized the sign I had made. She was really an innkeeper now. She came out to meet "the traveler," spick-and-span in a green-checked apron, her sleeves rolled to her armpits, fresh from the flour bin.

"Oh, mine gootness, it's Billy!" she screamed, pounding down the steps, shaking them with her great weight. The tears were in her eyes and she

laughed and cried together, then pushed me off for inspection.

"Too white," she said, shaking her head. "You not fed good, no? You need soup, yes? You come in queek and I feed you. Gootness, how I feed you, Billy!" I was glad to be cried over and shoved about. The large living-room was bare of furniture, but oh, so clean, and with quaint ornaments, stuffed owls and birds, on the corners of the mantel, and vivid green and red and blue mats crocheted of wool under lamps and vases. The house looked distinctly Hungarian. How each one was bringing her household gods into her new home with the first flush of prosperity. How the hearts harked back!

Tom was away across the valley building a house for a new homesteader, but she was not alone; Leeda was staying with her. Leeda came bashfully from the dining-room where she had been setting the table. It seemed that automobile parties stopped almost daily. There was a telephone now, and men gave their orders in advance. I could readily believe that one would drive a good many miles for one of Mother Lattig's dinners or to sleep in one of her clean, soft beds. She was making money. She told me her daughter was coming on the first train into the valley. She had waited a long time for this daughter.

Leeda blushed and stumbled against a bright-colored footstool constructed of tomato cans and covered with the remains of an old shawl—I had seen Mother Lattig make them long ago—and then came on to shake hands. Her hand was red and rough, and she had a hard muscular grip, but her face was very sweet and demure in a shy, German-housewifely way. She said her father was very well now and all the family were doing well. Her father had worked on the dredger all winter, but was busy now with his crops. He had a thousand acres in wheat. Leeda was evidently working for Mother Lattig.

In the face of fervent and voluble and repeated protestations, I rode on to my ranch. The last thing I heard was Mother Lattig's heated denunciations of my poor Tyke for not following me home. I turned back and whistled to him, but Mother Lattig was still belaboring him so unmercifully with her tongue that the poor brute was at sea as to just what was his move, and made none.

I drank from my spring, then opened the door to my lean-to cabin. It was clean but desolate. The Book-farmer had bached there. My wheat field did not look so prosperous as did those of the other ranchers, in spite of abundant water. Had the Book-farmer been unfaithful, or had he not known

how to irrigate? I walked over the ranch and braced up the rabbit wire in places where it needed repairing. That evening I went back to Mother Lattig's with my mind made up to improve my ranch at once and bring it up to the valley standard. I put in the evening re-winning Tyke.

As Tom would be away indefinitely, having several houses to build, I rode out the next morning to a newer homesteading district in search of a man to help me cut stone. I talked with several new settlers; they haggled over terms. This was different from our early experiences when any work on any terms would have been a godsend. Even the short time which had elapsed since the Clarks and myself had come into the country had made a difference; the pioneers of this year knew nothing of pioneering as we had known it. I finally found a man who was something of a stonemason and was reasonable in his charges.

Together we built the lookout tower on the butte. We added a wide porch across the front and made steps up from the spring, cutting them in the soft sandstone. There was a great stone fireplace and windows on all sides — large windows which framed pictures the equal of which no man ever painted. The furniture and trappings from my old den at home — shipped long ago but stored in Two Forks

—added the quality of livableness. My books filled one wall, and my reading table, lamp, and big leather chair were all there. Scattered over the floor were coyote and wolf skins which I had bought from our old man — long ago.

The place suited me. I did not mean to improve the lean-to. It was good enough to eat and cook in, and it answered for my rancher in my absence. The Book-farmer had not been altogether satisfactory; but his own ranch had suffered, too. The Book-farmer, I learned, had had a shock which interrupted the even flow of his rule of thumb efficiency. The pink-and-white teacher, after commuting, turned him down and went back to college. A vision had broken through his previously undisturbed serenity, impairing his usefulness. I was sorry for him — but I would find another man.

It was a soft June evening. I went up to my lookout tower after dinner at Mother Lattig's for a smoke, Tyke following me, now wholly devoted. I drew the big chair before the open door and flung myself into it. A golden summer haze lingered over the wide valley; far away the higher mountains showed heavy, black streaks where the snow was beginning to melt on their rocky ribs. The green patches — grain fields — were like emeralds, sunset colors flamed the sky, changing from crimson

to lavender and gold. I smoked and dreamed while Tyke beat his stump of a tail on the floor, demanding attention. It was a good enough life for any man, I told myself—a day of work, an evening of dreams, a pipe and a dog. Yes, it was enough for any man—it was enough.

The colors faded; the stars came out; my pipe was dead; my dog snored at my feet; yes, it was enough, it was enough, I told myself with insistence. Listening, I could hear the low nestling sound of meadow larks settling down for the night. Another sound caught my ear—I sat up.

There was a step on the stone stairway—a light, running step—a figure brushed past the windows—it stopped in the doorway—it was Susie.

“Billy!”

It was a new little Susie, more slender, older, but with her old-time level look and her old-time immaculateness. She wore a white linen suit and a saucy panama hat crowded down over her heavy flaxen braids.

“Well, well, little hired girl, and so you’ve come back!” I said, greeting her. I looked about. I had but the one chair—I had not planned for callers. Susie promptly took the chair and I took the doorstep.

“Everybody’s come back,” she announced, her

chin in the air. What a saucy way she always had had with her chin. Most chins are just—chins; Susie's was a distinct feature. Her feet were very pretty swinging below her trim white skirt as she swayed back and forth in the big leather chair. I had always liked Susie's feet; and she was still short—I was glad. Susie's height had been one of her worries.

"Everybody?" I repeated casually.

"The pink-and-white teacher—and she's made it up with the Book-farmer."

"Yes? Then my crops will get better attention."

"And Raz—from the cattle drive out to Ossing—and he's to marry the little widow and the leppy baby."

"Good—we'll have another neighbor."

"And Lizbeth—I stopped for a visit at the Q Ranch on my way in—and she's brought home a young doctor—or rather Dr. Monk did, to be his partner, because there are too many for one doctor now; and—and Lizbeth wants to see you very, very soon; she told me why; she thinks," my little hired girl dropped her eyes and began to finger the fringe on the chair—"she thinks you are all wrong—about it being best never to marry—she says when the will is built up very strong—and there are two—to keep it built up—and—and I'm sure

she loves the young doctor, even though he has got red hair and wears big glasses that make his eyes look bigger and dreamier than they are; I peeked under them once," she looked away confusedly.

"Good Lizbeth, I shall go to see her."

"And Bullpit came back, too; but the waxy man got him; some difference they had over dividing locater's fees. They said in Two Forks it was the most unsuccessful funeral ever held there—nobody cried; they sent the waxy man to the pen."

"Poor old Ratter!"

"And Tom—Tom's back—" she fingered the fringe of the leather chair. I deliberately filled my pipe, but neglected to strike the match as she hesitated; and she continued to hesitate—while I continued to neglect to strike the match.

"And—and he's to marry Leeda."

I looked closely at my little hired girl; was she joking? She was furiously braiding the fringe of the leather chair and in the dusk I could not see plainly; perhaps that was why I could not get the twinkle in her eyes.

I went deliberately to my phonograph. Ennis had sent it, and in an idle evening of catalogue shopping I had ordered a number of new records. I put one on and came back to the doorstep. It wasn't a classical selection; just an ordinary thing such as

you hear every day. But at the first words Susie suddenly ceased rocking, ceased braiding the fringe.

*Some one to love and cheer you
Sometimes when things go wrong;
Some one to snuggle near you,
Some one to share your song.
Some one to call you sweetheart,
After the day is done—*

I couldn't make out even when the song got that far whether or not the twinkle was there, for her smooth little flaxen head was buried in my shirt front and refused to be lifted. My pipe, unlighted, lay on the floor, guarded jealously by Tyke.

Susie and I are building a larger stone house down by the spring. She says it would be absurd to live on top of the butte all one's life, and besides a man needs a place all his own to go away and cuss in when things go wrong. Maybe, maybe, but some way I can't think things will ever go wrong again.

THE END

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